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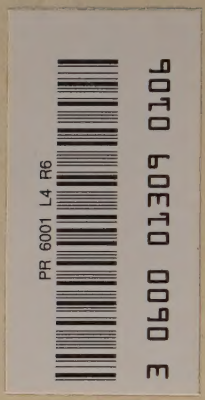

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and
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with contributions by Richard Aldington,
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Chatto & Windus

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ROADS TO GLORY

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1930

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MEDITATION
ON A GERMAN GRAVE

MEDITATION ON A GERMAN GRAVE

I

THE mind of man moves strangely and capriciously. Our lives are not really like a straight or curved line, but like a series of more and more complex relations between events, past, present, and future. When something happened to us in the past, that experience was complicated by former experiences, and when we return to it in memory, it is complicated again by our present situation and all that happened in between. That is why Ronald Cumberland's recollection of his meditation on a German grave ten years after the event was different from the event itself, although he thought it was the same. In fact, it was altered by his subsequent experiences and reflections, and was perhaps more poignant by contrast.

II

Cumberland came out of the war as dazed and weary and nearly as naked as Ulysses from his shipwreck. His demobilisation papers arrived early in 1919, and he left his battalion without regret and without farewells. The Maltese cart which took him to rail-head ploughed its way through snow two feet deep. The train of cattle-trucks—'40 hommes ou 8 chevaux,' indicating the comparative value of the cattle—ground

and jerked its incredibly slow way through the intense darkness and more intense cold of the winter night. Impossible to sleep. The officers in Cumberland's truck scrounged wood and a brazier, and so managed to avoid frost-bite. Several less lucky men had to be left behind at Armentières at dawn to be treated. At Dieppe the officers experienced the romantic chivalry of Britain—while they froze and shivered under canvas, they could see the German prisoners laughing and talking round glowing fires in warm huts. They had three days of it.

Cumberland was depressed, and not without reason. The war had utterly ruined him; his pay at Cox's ceased the moment he touched British shores; his blood-money was insignificant; his prospects uncertain. Indeed, if there was any certainty it was that he had no prospects. Standing on the prow of the ship which brought him nearer to the line of dirty white cliffs roofed with pure white snow, he wondered what on earth he was returning to, and why. The loaded revolver still in his belt, still stained with the mud of his last battle, reminded him that one solution remained possible.

'Can one be too cynical?' he asked himself. 'Surely, after what we've done, after all we've suffered, after all they've said, we shall be welcomed and helped.'

The only welcome and help he, and most of the others, received came from the goat-bearded Nonconformist 'war-worker' at the British port, who bleated in tremulous tones:

'This way, men! This way for your buns and milk!'

But even he quailed before the cynical laugh with which his offer was received by the little knot of hard, war-bitten subalterns who heard him.

'Buns and milk!' exclaimed a handsome but hard-eyed, hard-mouthed captain of twenty-five, 'C——s and whisky are what we want, you bloody old idiot!'

Cumberland went direct to London and took a room over a restaurant where he had eaten when on leave. He was given a room, about eight feet square, for twenty-five shillings a week. He had foolishly abandoned his pre-war flat, or rather of necessity, since he could not afford to pay the rent during the war, and it seemed idiotic to keep a flat in London when booked for a grave in Flanders. He went there, found the flat had been re-let at double the old rent, and that his effects were stored in the cellar. Many of them were missing, others deteriorated by damp. Within a week of demobilisation he was forced to sell most of them to buy food and pay his rent. He tried to find a cheaper room, but already with the increasing mass of returning soldiers, flats and rooms were rushing up in price. A rich harvest, which was efficiently reaped.

The first night Cumberland was in London he slept for fourteen hours. Thereafter he was the prey of sleeplessness. The accumulated neurosis of years could not be worked off in one heavy sleep of exhaustion. A vague but intense feeling of apprehension tormented him, an 'anxiety-complex' with which he struggled violently, but in vain. Night after night he

turned and twisted in his hired bed, long after the last bus had rumbled by, listening to the rattle and hoot of a late taxi, the voices of drunken parties, the slow footfall of policemen. The light from an arc-lamp crudely pierced the cracks in the blind. He shut his eyes, and desperately kept them shut ; but sleep fled from him. A disorderly tumult was in him, a phantasmagoria of dreadful scenes mixed with dread of the future and a bitter boredom. He switched on the light and tried to read a novel, but the insipid words were soon eclipsed by memories of harsh reality—impossible to enjoy these footling fictions with the taste of death and reality in the mouth. About six he would fall into an uneasy sleep, and be awakened at eight for breakfast.

He needed rest, tranquillity, reassurance, companionship ; he got uneasiness, anxiety, uncertainty, and loneliness. Two days after his return he plunged into a despairing search for work. He did not quite know what he was looking for—several years of life in the Army had unfitted him for most human activities. Without capital, without influence, without training, what could he do ? An officer at the Base Camp had suggested journalism, his own trade, and had offered to help. Cumberland hopefully went to call on him at the offices of the newspaper for which Forster had worked. He was curtly told that Mr. Forster was not there. He asked rather timidly to see the editor, and after nearly an hour's wait in a dreary, dirty, ill-furnished room, scattered with torn dirty paper and decorated with newspaper placards, a man came into the room, holding his visiting-card.

'Captain Cumberland?'

'Yes.'

'What do you want?'

'I came to see Forster who thought—er—suggested I might get some work. . . .'

'Forster isn't here. We regret it, but the paper is already overstaffed, and our expenses are enormous. We can't turn away men who 've worked for us for a couple of years to make room for others, however deserving.'

'So it isn't much good my . . .'

'Quite useless. We can't even take Forster back, though I believe my predecessor did promise to keep his job open. However, nobody could foresee that the war would last so long, or the present state of affairs exist.'

A gust of bitterness blew over Cumberland's spirit, but he scarcely even felt resentful. After all, why should they dismiss perfectly efficient and decent men who for years had been of national importance, to make room for quite inexperienced men on the mere pretext (to quote that very editor's printed words) that they had 'saved their country, saved civilisation, saved the Liberty of the World, which owes them an imperishable debt of gratitude?' He rose to his feet.

'Thanks very much. Excuse me for troubling you and wasting your time. Good-day.'

'Good-day.'

The situation was somewhat more than desperate, and the Webley appeared inevitable, when a note from

Cox's informed Cumberland that he had been credited with his blood-money. But how swiftly that inadequate monetary ' compensation ' for lost years of life slipped from his fingers ! His demobilisation card had informed him that within ten days he must be in mufti, or disciplinary action would be taken. The same card also told him that if his services were again required he was to report immediately to Shorncliffe —a discharge which was not a discharge. Everything in London was exceptionally dear, especially for demobilised soldiers, who all wanted the same things at the same time. The blood-money of the legions soon slithered into the wide pockets of patriotic tradesmen. A pre-war five-guinea suit in very post-war material cost twelve guineas. Overcoats, linen, evening clothes were fabulously dear. Cumberland found that half his money had gone in a week.

He still clung to the idea of journalism, and called on the editor of a very patriotic newspaper, recommended to him by Forster. He sent in his card, and to his surprise was at once received. The editor rose from his chair and bowed, almost obsequiously :

' Most happy to meet you, Captain Cumberland. Do sit down. What can I do for you ? '

Bewildered by so much affability, Cumberland stammered awkwardly and ashamedly—that he wanted work. The editor gazed at him in amazement :

' But aren't you the Captain Cumberland who is Equerry to the Queen ? I thought you 'd come to give us some social news. . . .'

Cumberland laughed.

'No, I 'm just an ordinary infantry officer. His Majesty has addressed me as "trusty and well-beloved," but I 've never been nearer him or his gracious Consort than a review twenty miles behind the line. I 'm looking for work, and thought I 'd try journalism. A fellow named Forster spoke of you.'

'Forster? He 's on the *Daily* ——, isn't he?'

'He was, but I was told there that they couldn't take him back. I——'

The editor had completely recovered from his momentary attack of politeness, and leaned back in his chair, tapping the table idly with a ruler.

'I 'm afraid it 's much the same here. We 're full up, can't take on any one else, and conditions are deplorable, deplorable.'

'I suppose they are. But what are the soldiers to do—shoot themselves?'

'Oh, come, come, that 's hardly fair, you know. After all, you 're quite untrained, and journalism 's a skilled job, a very skilled profession.'

'Of course, but what chance had we of training for anything?'

'Haven't you relatives and friends, influence?'

'I 'm an orphan. Most of my friends have littered north France with their graves.'

'Umph.'

The editor meditated, then went to a table covered with books, and took up a heavy volume of about eight hundred pages. It was entitled 'How to Win the War, and After,' and was signed by a very elderly member of the Athenæum Club.

'I feel we ought all to make an effort to help you fellows after what you 've done for the Country.'

The editor coughed importantly, as one addressing a public meeting.

'If you 'd care to review this book for us, and can turn out a decent notice, we 'll be very glad to print it. I think it would be instructive to have a soldier's views on Sir Ralph Sturt's monumental contribution to the war. Of course, we can't pay you anything, but it will be practice for you, excellent practice, and—you may keep the book. Write the review, and then come and see me again. Good-bye, good-bye.'

Cumberland found himself in the street, with the book under his left arm. It was heavy in more than one sense. He dropped into a Lyons restaurant, and frugally ordered a cup of coffee and roll and butter for his lunch. He turned over the pages of the book. It was indeed monumental—a monument of die-hard imbecility, imperialist rant, senile hatred of the 'Hun,' even bitterer if unconscious hatred for the young of England, who were to be 'disciplined' and ruthlessly exploited in mad schemes of political aggression and commercial greed. It was written in the prosy style of Club prophets, cloudy with mixed metaphors, and turbid with every known cliché in the language. No man had ever read it save the author and unhappy printer's reader, and no man ever would. Cumberland decided that he would not force those virgin pages.

He wrote some short war sketches, rather vivid little vignettes of real happenings, trying to give the true

' feel ' of the war, the genuine sensations and feelings of soldiers. Every paper rejected them instantly. He then sat down in a mood of bitter cynicism, and composed two others, giving the public what the public was supposed to want—jolly Generals, cheerio subalterns, comic hero-Tommies, topping life for real men, rotten old Huns, and how-sorry-we-are-to-leave-the-dear-old-trenches. Cumberland thought his parody was obvious to the thickest skull. Not at all. The two sketches were snapped up, paid for at once, with a request for more on the same lines, ' showing how our splendid fellows are adapting themselves to the glorious Peace they have won.'

Cumberland held the cheque and letter at arm's length, as if they had been malodorous. He was not encouraged by his success.

As he glanced through the newspapers one morning his eye observed the name of Lord Turcaray, who had given ten thousand pounds towards a refined home for indigent gentlewomen. Lord Turcaray was a ' financial magnate,' though perhaps ' money magnet ' would have been a more accurate term. When merely Mr. Abraham Eisenbaum he had been indebted for assistance to Cumberland's father. In fact, the elder Cumberland had helped Mr. Eisenbaum out of an awkward situation, into which he had been plunged by his extreme magnetism for money.

Cumberland wrote him a letter, recalling tactfully his father's name, explaining his own difficulties, and asking if Lord Turcaray would see him and help him

to get work. Lord Turcaray did not grant an audience, but sent a very brief letter of introduction to one, Mr. Jacob M'Leish, which letter was an almost peremptory order that Cumberland should be employed.

At the sight of Lord Turcaray's almost illegible but well-known script, Mr. M'Leish bowed himself as in the House of the Lord. Cumberland was appointed secretary to a company, in which Mr. M'Leish was ' interested,' in the watered-capital line. The company had been formed to make spaghetti from the machinery which during the war had made cordite. This was a brilliant idea, but overlooked the fact that the English hate spaghetti, and that those countries which consume it had quite enough of their own—and depreciated currencies. Cumberland got four hundred a year, and worked very hard to earn it. The company went bankrupt with the collapse of the trade boom, and Cumberland was once more workless. Mr. M'Leish and Lord Turcaray were both so much occupied in saving their own skins and interests, that they had no time for his.

Cumberland had lived very frugally and saved a hundred and fifty pounds, while a small but very useful legacy had come to him from an aunt he had never seen. With this money he started a small publishing business in partnership with a brilliant young Jew, named Isaacson, who had a thousand pounds. It was, of course, a ridiculously inadequate sum, and the business would have failed but for Isaacson. Cumberland was amazed by his cleverness, and no less

amazed and touched by his generosity and scrupulous loyalty to his partner. Cumberland chiefly attended to office routine and read manuscripts ; Isaacson made the final choice always, and did a good deal of his own travelling. Occasionally Cumberland would urge the publication of a rejected manuscript which he thought good. Isaacson would shake his head :

' You 're right, it 's quite a good book, but good in the wrong way. When we 've made our fortune we 'll do our duty to literature by publishing a few such—and we 'll lose money on them. Remember my four esses—sluggishness, sentimentality, sensationalism, and snobbery. That 's what we have to cater for.'

Isaacson divided their publications into books to read and books to be showed off. So they published sentimental stories of pure but fascinating English heroines, detective, murder, and horror stories, for railway journeys ; and limited editions on fine paper of unread English and foreign classics for purposes of snobbery. They did very well with several series of snappy but practical works on Golfing Geniuses, Heroes of Cricket, Racing Supermen, Lords of the Ring, and Eminent Thugs. More than once they were near bankruptcy, but Isaacson always managed to steer them safely through the rapids. Cumberland became attached to Isaacson, and worked day and night to back up his efforts. Months sped into years in this ceaseless battle to make good, with very limited capital and the necessity of giving large discount and long credit. It was five years before they scored their first big success—a somewhat lurid and fanciful picture

of Mayfair society, which sold eighty thousand copies in a month. And then, as they were able to extend their activities, work became harder and longer than ever.

Towards the end of August 1928, Cumberland and Isaacson were working hard over their autumn programme. For several days Cumberland had felt ill—curious fits of dizziness and an acute pain over the heart. He was standing beside Isaacson, looking over some advertising blocks, when the dizziness suddenly descended on him more violently than ever. He became almost blind, and staggered. Isaacson leaped up, and caught him ; then helped him to a chair.

' Good God, Ronald, what is it ? '

For a few moments Cumberland could not reply—the pain over his heart was too sharp. He managed to gasp :

' Don't know—afraid I 'm going to faint—it 's nothing—I 'll be all right.'

Isaacson sent out for some brandy, and in about fifteen minutes Cumberland sat up.

' All clear. Let 's get on with the job.'

Isaacson looked at him grimly, and then called a number over the telephone.

' Hullo. That you, Dr. Jesperson ? Isaacson, the publisher, speaking. Yes, I 'm all right, but I want you to have a look at my partner at once, he 's not well. What ? Impossible ? You 're engaged until the end of next week ? Well, look here, Doctor, Cumberland 's in charge of that book of yours, and unless he 's fit I 'm afraid it 'll have to be postponed until . . . What ?

Oh, all right. Six to-night? Right you are. Good-bye.'

'I say!' exclaimed Cumberland, 'what did you tell him that for? You know his book 's practically arranged.'

'Only way to deal with the highly successful. Vanity, thy name is Harley Street.'

'Well, I 'll finish my work and then trot along.'

'No, you don't! You 'll sit there until it 's time to go, and I 'll take you in a taxi.'

Dr. Jesperson put Cumberland through an immense questionnaire, which made him feel as if he were joining another and more exacting Army, and then examined him carefully. When he had finished:

'Stay here, I want to have a word with your partner.'

Cumberland never knew what was said, but as the taxi took them back to his lodgings, Isaacson said:

'Jesperson says there 's nothing wrong with you organically, old chap, but you 're worn out with overwork and anxiety—three and a half years in the Army, and nine years' constant slogging. You 've got to take a rest.'

'But I can't afford . . .'

'Oh yes, you can! Isaacson and Cumberland 's not such a dud firm as you think. D' you know the bed-rock estimate of our assets is nearly nine thousand, with over two thousand in cash? And you own half of it.'

'But it 's all been your doing!'

'Rats! If I hadn't had a man I could trust im-

plicitly, and who worked himself to death to back me up, for a paltry four hundred a year, I could never have done it. No, Cumberland, we went into this fifty-fifty, and that business is as much yours as mine. You never grouched when I drew hundreds more than you for entertainment and travelling and bribes. You trusted me.'

Cumberland tried to protest, but Isaacson went on :

' We 've fought, and we 've won. Nothing can keep us back now, if we don't get reckless. We 'll take that cub from Oxford with his papa's five thousand, and try to knock some sense into his superior mind. And meanwhile you 're going to take a three months' rest, and you 'll take three hundred as an extra bonus to do it, and when you come back you 'll draw eight hundred a year. Understand ? '

Isaacson said this almost fiercely, as if he had been threatening something dire. Cumberland was so much touched he hardly knew what to say. It was true, he did need a rest and a fairly long one—thirteen years with nothing but snatched week-ends and brief ' holidays ' when he had worked nearly as hard as at the office. He had been so much absorbed in the work that he had almost overlooked their success. He had long ago resigned himself to a bare living. And now, three months' rest with no worry about money ! The taxi stopped before he answered. Cumberland got out first, and looked straight into Isaacson's eyes, as they stood together on the curb.

' You 're not saying this because you think I 'm ill ? Are you sure the firm can afford it ? '

'Dead sure! Come down to the office at noon to-morrow—not a minute earlier—and I 'll have the money for you. And then off you go.'

They shook hands in a way which left no need for words.

III

As Cumberland sat listening to the unending rumble of the Rome express, thinking of these things, it suddenly occurred to him that this was the first time for many years that he had thought about his life and his past. Really thought, that is. Now, in this unexpected leisure, he thought a good deal. Of course he wasn't really ill—that was largely a kindly device of Isaacson's to give him a holiday—but he found he soon got tired, and liked most to sit about and meditate. After all, he had had very little time for meditation, any very deep plunge into himself. Thirteen years is a big slice from the life of a man still under forty. Three years fighting and somehow miraculously keeping alive; then an abrupt revolution, a sudden jerk into the almost as merciless life of Peace, with its grim slogan: Money or starve. As the train ran more and more slowly through the Savoy mountains, so beautiful with their little gushing waterfalls from recent rains and their wooded lower slopes, he found he was thinking less of them than of the grim crude laws of human social life. Money or starve. So curious, so ridiculous. As if all that mattered in life were the continuous transfer of little round bits of metal and pieces of more or less dirty paper, marked with a number,

the name of a state, and the facsimile signature of some unknown treasury official. Perhaps in the future all this would change, and people would live with simplicity, dignity, and content, instead of wearing themselves out in this feverish delusion. Thirteen years of life gone—for what? He put his hand up and touched his wallet in his breast-pocket—yes, safe, with its five hundred francs, five thousand lire, and letter of credit for three hundred pounds. Obedient to the bank manager's warning, Cumberland kept the little identification book with his signature in another pocket.

Cumberland had chosen Rome, in spite of the heat of early September, because of an old memory. A few years before the war he had spent an unforgettable autumn and winter there with his father and mother. Life had been all happiness and sunshine then, but soon after his mother had died, then his father. After that there had been two or three drab years in a City office, and the war. He saw those months in Rome through a very golden haze. Ronald and his father had adored it, although Mrs. Cumberland had regretted the absence of ' decent English society,' and disapproved of the tea, even in the English tea-shop in the Piazza di Spagna. But Ronald and his father had explored Rome tirelessly and delightedly. Ronald read the English books on Rome, his father the talian and German ones. Their taste was extremely eclectic, and they passed happily from the elegant classicism of the small temple near the Tiber to the florid splendours of the Colonna and

Borghese palaces. Cumberland's memory was of white sunny days, vast rows of statues in long gorgeous galleries, the immensity of St. Peter's, slices of purple melon on little stalls at street corners, the lizards on the Via Appica Antica, drives in fiacres with white covers over the seats, the sweet melancholy music of street violinists, and the uselessly stately tread of imposing Carabineri. But above all, the memory was warmth and peace, the peace of untroubled life in a calm unfretted world. . . .

He was disappointed with Rome. It was still beautiful indeed, but without his father to say ' Here Gibbon must have heard the monks singing in the Ara Coeli,' or ' Here 's the rostrum—let 's see how much we can remember of the Catiline oration,' the ruins and the churches had somehow lost their charm. And the charm had gone too from Roman life. Cars hooted through the narrow streets, the old restaurants had vanished in a wholesale demolition, a pinchbeck Americanism had taken the place of the old lazy dignity. The beggars had gone, but so had the friendliness and simplicity. Under official encouragement the age-old society of Judas appeared to have taken on a new lease of life ; the Eternal City swarmed with intellectual English, neo-Thomists possessed of small Latin and less Greek, and with homosexual peers in violet cassocks. But worst of all, a strange feeling of moral oppressiveness hung over the town. It was unpleasant to feel that he was probably being watched, that an imprudent phrase might involve him in disagreeable results.

In his discouragement he almost thought of returning to England, when he got a letter from some friends of Isaacson's with an invitation. They had taken a villa in a remote island off the Mediterranean coast of France, and invited him for several weeks. It was late in September, and he determined to go at once, by boat via Naples and Marseilles. He sent a telegram, and started off next day.

The feeling of oppression lifted almost as soon as he left Rome. He travelled by the newly opened coast route from Rome to Naples. The sun was hot as the train ran over the Campagna towards Magna Graeca. The line passed a series of great bare hills, rock-rugged, sparsely dotted with ancient olive trees, or rayed with thin ranks of vines. Gradually the hills rose to a range of mountains uplifted from burned, almost coral-red fields, into broad lovely peaks. Ancient hill-towns in their girdles of grey walls were set like crowns on the lower crests, or lay in high recesses like a handful of semi-precious stones poured carelessly from a giant hand. In the burned-up fields were strange drab-looking buffaloes and gaunt, drab pigs, looking very like tiny twin brothers of the buffaloes. As the train hurtled past small villages he caught glimpses of handsome peasant women in their traditional *festa* costume —red skirt, white bodice, open black stays, and white flappy headdresses. Great trails of sea-mist, like immense figures in diaphanous white garments, moved slowly up the higher slopes, and made him think of the chorus of the Oceanides in 'Prometheus.' The great mass of Vesuvius rose up far ahead to the left,

and in half an hour he was engaged in his first squabble with a Neapolitan porter.

He spent the evening and most of the next day in Naples, waiting for the boat. What struck and interested him most were the little market stalls in a rather slummy street behind Santa Lucia. Such a carousal of colours ! Such movement and bargaining and gesticulating and laughing and screaming and shaking of heads and waving of hands and reluctant laying down of nickel coins ! And all this life flowed so unconsciously round a pageant of colours. On the stalls were heaps of sweet peppers, some delicate jade green, others brilliant yellow or shiny red, carelessly tumbled out of baskets so that their crinkly shapes lay scattered in every position. There were piles of large rich southern grapes, black and golden ; large, opulent tomatoes ; dull purple, rather womby looking egg-plants ; majestic pumpkins cut asunder to show the dull orange interior, and green water-melons also cut open to let you see the black-specked purple pulp.

With that colour still in his memory, and a respect for genuine Neapolitan ices, Cumberland went on board the large cargo-boat bound for Marseilles. The ship was still unloading. Under the crude glare of unshaded electric lamps in a stifling atmosphere of heat and dust, men naked to the waist were heaving haricot beans into sacks with shallow baskets. The rattling donkey-engine hoisted the bags and dumped them on to a barge. The men staggered about, with the sweat pouring off them, and the grey dust caked over faces and bodies. They looked muscular but not beautiful,

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terribly deformed, in that harsh dusty light, labouring with a frantic exertion which filled Cumberland with pity and indignation. They also were confronted with the merciless threat: Money or starve. Under the stress of that ultimatum, backed by the Fascist revolver, they laboured as men cannot labour and remain human. Their faces were sullen, ferocious, and meagre.

The first officer, elegant in white immaculate uniform, anxious to air his English, came and stood beside Cumberland, and remarked on the beauty of the night.

'It is indeed beautiful,' said Cumberland, 'I had heard that moonrise over Vesuvius is lovely, but I did not know how lovely. But, tell me, do these men always have to work like this? It 's dreadful!'

'Bah!' said the officer, flipping off the end of his cigar-ash. 'What are they? *Lazzaroni*! Let them work.'

The boat drifted out of the harbour, and then moved slowly across that bay, whose beauty can be destroyed by no effort of man, not even by would-be highbrow disparagement. The world was so clear, so tranquil, so remote, under that flood of moonlight. The great mountain with its soft curl of smoke; the long chains and clusters of lights; Capri and the peninsula of Sorrento in the far distance; and then ahead Pausylipo, Bagnoli, Procida, and Ischia. The modern world slipped away into the shadows, and the soft moonlight showed only the shapes of rocks and peaks and islands and vague outlines of cities in a timeless beauty. For

a long time he remained on deck alone, after the other passengers, vague Levantines, had gone to their bunks. The old tramp steamer chugged gently and almost noiselessly over the soft level sea. Faint stars gleamed through the moon-flooded sky. When fatigue forced him to go to his bunk, it was long after midnight.

The slow old easy-going ship was two and a half days making the passage, two and a half days of delicious peace to Cumberland. The lovely golden dawn over the gently swelling blue waves, the long sunny hours, the stars and moon at night, the distant headlands of the Italian coast and far-off outlines of islands, softened him, relaxed the tensity of years of effort. He lived his present peace, but lived again also old forgotten memories. He lived, not so much in a perpetual meditation, as in complete harmony with the loveliness about him ; he felt his memories rather as emotions than as thoughts. He was surprised to find how much of his past life surged up in him, and how differently he valued things.

The ' to what end ? ' which comes to many men who have laboured strenuously was insistently questioning him. To what end all the turmoil and strife and effort of his life, forced upon him by the world of men into which he had been born, when the other world of sky, sea and land into which he had no less been born was so unhurrying, so august, so unperturbed ? To what end also the frantic driven labour of the Neapolitan dockers ? Cheap haricot beans ! He was too languid to grapple with the problem as a problem. He re-

peated to himself: 'Cheap haricot beans, cheap haricot beans! Cheap lives, cheap aims! But what aim have I?' And then the dinner-bell rang. . . .

Cumberland hired a small motor-boat to take him to the island. The quiet blue, sun-glittering bay where he landed seemed tropical, not European. There were flat-roofed fishermen's cottages, and one Italian-looking house with pinky-brown walls. In the curve of the bay two low tiled cottages lay half-hidden among pampas grass, tall canes, and eucalyptus trees. He half expected to see Paul and Virginie come from one of them, followed by negroes carrying bundles on poles.

He left his baggage to be brought up on donkeys, and walked to the villa, which was pointed out to him, set on a broad peak six hundred feet above the sea. Narrow rocky paths led through perpetual shrubbery. The tallest trees were feathery Mediterranean pines, brightly green and fresh against the background of intense blue sea. The scent of pine resin was quenched in the fragrance of flowering rosemary, lemon-smelling lavender, sweet alyssum, thyme, myrtle and lentisk. The whole island seemed a great bowl of perfume. Speckled lizards sunned themselves and scuttled across the rough path. Grasshoppers whirred up on blue or bright red wings. Large bronze dragonflies soared by with a dry crackle of swift wings. He came to a grove of arbutus trees, bearing clusters of waxen white cup-shaped blossoms, and round fruits ripening from lemon yellow through orange to strawberry red.

Isaacson's friends left him very much to himself,

and he wandered about a good deal alone. He went down every day with them to bathe in a little bay. The sea ripples, clear and transparent white on the pale sand, soon deepened to peacock greens and blues away from shore. As he swam gently along, and looked down through the mirror-clear water he saw fringy sea-weeds and rocks, sea-urchins and sea-anemones and sea-cucumbers and red-orange starfish. Sometimes a pale ghostly cuttle-fish darted horrid stealthy arms from a rock crevice.

There was a high mound with a seat in the villa courtyard. From there he could look over fifty miles of coast-line, with wooded recesses and headlands and vast capes, backed by bare mountains, and a sea with hilly islands resting on it like huge tranquil animals. In the recesses were little mosaics made up of tiny white and pink cubes—villages. The mountains were white in the morning, pink and gold in the afternoon, deep indigo at twilight. The lights over sea and land changed from hour to hour. Sometimes he could see distant snow mountains hanging delicately pink-white in the remote air. . . .

Cumberland loved that seat. There was a cross-shaped back over which he could crook his arm as he lounged there, letting himself be drenched with the beauty of sky, sea, and earth, a perpetual drama of loveliness. He had not known that such beauty existed. He sat there evening after evening, in the silence, and life flowed into him. He felt himself absorbed into the eternal drama, the mysterious play of forces. It was

as though the rhythm of his life, forced for years to an abrupt staccato, gradually brought itself into harmony with an immense sublime symphony. He felt confusedly that life was not so much doing things, as being something. Not the possession of conveniences and comforts—mere gadgets—but the possession of oneself, and some disinterested aim. His past years became remote. The long struggle for success with Isaacson seemed futile, except that it had given him the chance to make this discovery. What was real about that was not the success, but the relation with Isaacson, the friendliness, the comradeship. And the war years, those lacerating awful years of torture, what a waste, what a devilish waste! The cruelty of men to men, the insane stupidity of it! The ruthless cruelty and stupidity which had sent one-half of Europe to murder the other half (and for what? good God, for what?) were still there, still triumphant—witness the cruel exploitation of the Neapolitan dockers. . . .

A glowing crimson sun sank beside a dark blue island into cool blue water. Cumberland watched it, with his arm crooked over the cross-shaped seat back. Something in the attitude was vaguely but movingly familiar to him. He had sat in exactly that position once before in his life at twilight. But where?

It came to him in a flash. Yes, yes, of course! On the Somme. In October 1918, exactly ten years before. Where was it? Somewhere north-east of Bapaume? Wasn't it? Yes. Yes, it was. Divisional rest after

coming out from Hulluch. Then south. Advance party on ahead in a lorry which lost its way—yes—came up the main road late at night, bumping madly over the holes. Somewhere or other the lorry stopped in the darkness, and the driver's harsh voice said :

' Divisional Camp over there to the right, sir.'

The little group of officers wandered about, followed by their servants staggering under the burden of valises, looking for the camp. The ground was covered with the wreckage of a defeated army, a ruined nation. Far ahead artillery rumbled, and they could see the very faint glow of Verey lights. But the abandoned battle-field was canopied with silence, terrifying as the endless silence of the grave. As they stood lost among the wreckage in that arrest of life under the black lowering sky, they felt as if dead and yet sufficiently alive to feel the horror of death. It was hours before they found the little cluster of bell tents and Nissen huts.

The camp was pitched just behind the British reserve line of March 1918. In front were three German cemeteries. Over each was a huge cross, marked 21–3–18, with the name of a regiment. There in each case lay the commander, with his officers on either side, and behind them row upon row of their men. How the Germans had paid for that victory ! And how had flesh and blood endured that agony ? The British officers, waiting for orders, walked out and crossed the Hindenburg line, once so much dreaded, now three rows of triple barbed wire, wrecked and crushed by tanks, silent in the soft October afternoon.

The desolation of that landscape! The churned-up earth, the leagues on leagues on leagues of shell-holes, the infinite debris, the trees shattered to jagged stumps, the few shattered stumps of walls marking a village, the trenches littered with broken rusting rifles, machine guns, grenades, Lewis drums, Vickers belts, British and German cartridges, dud shells—wreckage, waste, ruin. The bodies had already been carried away and buried. Buried everywhere. Sometimes in cemeteries by battalions, more often in groups of five to twenty as they had been hastily collected, occasionally singly. Over them all was the cross, that final, devastatingly ironical hypocrisy. The symbol of the Idealist over the work of the Realists. . . .

The island was quite silent, except for the very faint voices of his friends in the villa. They were laughing, and he heard the rattle of a cocktail shaker. The sunset faded to deep mourning violet; the seemingly infinite sea was cold indigo with broad livid streaks; the distant mountain peaks still flushed a hard red. The air was still and sweet to his taste. A cricket chirred, and a large bat flapped noiselessly by. Beautiful silence, beautiful sky just pricked out with dim stars, beautiful peace.

And yes, after that walk they had come back for tea, and he had had one of the usual futile arguments with a violent Imperialist.

'Well, we 've beaten the bloody Hun, and now we 'll make him pay.'

'Beaten him! Hunger and despair beat him, not us. Pay! What can pay for this desolation, this murder? Pay! What can pay for lives, for the wreck of us who survive?'

'Your life belongs to the Empire. Think yourself damned lucky to have it. What more d' you want?'

What more do you want!

Cumberland got up abruptly, and walked away from the tent in the gathering twilight. To the east was the sinister glow of burning villages, a dull sinister glow under a heavy sky. He passed a sentry, who sprang to attention and saluted. You 've got your life, what more do you want? How can one argue about instincts, feelings, mute convictions? What more do you want? Why, everything, and not only for oneself, but for all. Why, peace, an end to murder and senseless exploitation, an end to horror and useless cruelty, some sort of hope for a man and a woman that when they pour life and ecstasy into each other's bodies they are not creating one more corpse for a battlefield. Some hope, some aim, some decency, something better than this immense crop of murders into which the hope of mankind has collapsed.

He walked along behind the parados of the old British line. He was weary with discouragement and grief, and sat down beside a mound. It was the grave of a German soldier, he could see that by the shape of the cross. He crooked his arm over it, as if over the shoulder of a man, and leaned forward. . . .

IV

' Brother, terrible silent brother, down there in the dark soil, what have we done to each other ? What have we done ? I am " alive," you are " dead," but there is some communication between us. I feel you down there ; perhaps you can feel me. Oh, brother, why had you to die so young and by so cruel a death ? It 's too dark to read the name on your cross ; it 's too dark in me to know you more than dimly, just as a man. Whether you came from the Rhine or Bavaria, from Prussia or distant Silesia or Saxony, whether you were tinker, tailor, rich man, poor man, you were a soldier, undoubtedly a soldier. A German soldier, my enemy, lying dead there.

' Brother, what have we done to each other ? Why are you lying there dead so young, and I so young as good as dead crouched on the grave above you ? Dear murdered boy, your enemy mourns for you. My throat hurts with grief for you. You, and the hundreds, the thousands, the tens of thousands, the millions of us, who lie like you, soiled earth under a soiled world.

' Brother, I know you 're dead, I know you 're nothing. I know you 're mere chemicals. But what am I ? Mere chemicals. I know no German, you no English, but somehow we speak to each other. Oh, brother, it 's driving me mad—what have we done to each other ?

' Yes, yes, I 'll be calm. But what can I *do* ? You see, the war is ending, and I shall live, while you for

ever are a little bundle of dead bones. Oh, they 'll take you back to the Fatherland, and they 'll exploit you. They 'll exploit the deep confused feelings of all us men and women about you. Hereafter when we think of you, and we shall think often of you, there 'll be tears in our eyes and a hurt in the throat. And " they," the real enemies, will say you were a hero, they 'll say you died for your Fatherland, and that it was sweet and decorous that you should die. They 'll bring out your bones as a show. They 'll worship you as a sort of god of destruction and death.

' Brother, there must be justice somewhere, or the world is an indescribable horror. Perhaps it is, but need it be ? We won't ask for vengeance—though what a vengeance we might demand !—we 'll ask for justice, we 'll ask at least that this shall not happen again.

' There are children now alive who may be tricked and forced into the despair and misery we have suffered. It shan't be, it shan't be ! Brother, I swear it, by your cross, by your agony, by your grave. If ever the rulers of my country declare another Great War, the hand which their predecessors have trained to murder shall murder them. We 'll turn the weapon of their crimes against them. A trained man who is prepared to throw away his life can be certain of taking at least one life. That, at least, is promised you.

' But the years will pass, brother, and the survivors will sink one by one into the grave, and there 'll be none to remember, none to warn, none to threaten and avert. The living children may not see it, but the children unborn will grow up to it, bred up to murder,

as you and I were bred by the men (were they men ?) who sent us here. The young will not know ; they 'll be exploited by the selfish, rather stupid old men and the greedy tradesmen and the venal journalists and the hysterical women. They 'll be " heroes " like you and me.

' Brother, is it quite useless ? Perhaps it is. But I know you are with me, and I promise you to do my best. I wish I were lying beside you. My life, my real life 's as much gone as yours. I 'm the shadow, the echo of a man, a husk from which the life has been ruthlessly smashed in this fratricidal hatred. I 'll do my best. But they won't heed, they 'll go when the plotted time arrives, they 'll murder each other with yet more frightful weapons, for the honour of a country, the love of a whore motherland. They 'll die all right. Sweet and decorous that they should die, a sacrifice to human stupidity and malevolence.

' Farewell, brother, farewell. I 'm a handful of earth and a bucket of water, as you were when the British shell or bullet hit you. I 'm just a human animal as you were. But I 'll do my best.'

VICTORY

VICTORY

I

A MOTOR despatch-rider, with a broad blue-and-white band on his khaki arm, chugged and bumped along the *pavé* road. He slowed down as he came to two infantry officers, arguing over maps, and straddled his legs out like a hobby-horse rider as he handed over a slip of folded paper.

' From Division, sir. Urgent.'

Captain Baron, commanding ' C ' Company, shoved his transparent map case under his arm and irritatedly thrust back his tin hat, which was new and chafed his head. He was a plump, stuggy little man in gold-rimmed glasses, in peace time the head of the clerical department of a large London commercial firm, and enormously devoted to ' bumph,' *i.e.* all the vast paper apparatus of war. His conscientiousness in answering paper questions drew down on him and his cursing subalterns unending streams of chits and reports. He spent hours a day in useless writing. This made him so tired that he was always dropping off to sleep, like the Dormouse in *Alice*. Under the stress of perpetual insomnia and conscientiousness this mildest of men had become frightfully irritable. He liked a well-planned inalterable routine, and his conscientiousness was always flabbergasted by any scrimshanking in his subordinates. He petulantly disapproved of the open

warfare which had suddenly come after years of trench routine: unexpected things kept happening, and decisions had to be made at once without any guiding precedent—which was most incorrect. Consequently, much of the practical work of the company was performed by his second-in-command, a tall young man, who submitted to his superior's fantasies with bored resignation—an attitude he adopted to the whole war.

'Tch, tch, tch! Now what are we to make of this, Ellerton? Another of these *wretched* counter-orders!'

Ellerton glanced at the despatch. It was marked 'Urgent,' and contained a peremptory order to all units not to cross the Mons-Maubeuge road. Baron mechanically pushed up his ill-fitting helmet again, and continued irritatedly:

'What *do* they want us to do? First we get urgent orders to push on at all costs and establish contact with the Boche—the Colonel strafed me not fifteen minutes ago because I hadn't made good that bally road. I sent Hogbin with a chit to Warburton, telling him to take his platoon and establish posts three hundred yards beyond the road. And now comes this order from Division! What the devil do they mean?'

Ellerton looked slowly round him, and took a deep breath. The dull misty twilight of a greyish November afternoon was deepening about them. The worn *pavé* road, still littered with debris from the retreating German armies, ran with dreary straightness through bare blank fields. A few hundred yards in front were the meagre leafless trees of the main road from Mau-

beuge to Mons. To their left was a dirty little hamlet, intact except for the smoke-blackened ruins of the church, burned in 1914.

'I should say the war is ending.'

Baron was amazed and annoyed by this remark.

'Don't talk such nonsense! Why, we 're scarcely in Belgium yet, and we 've got to get to Berlin. The old Boche will make a stand at every river, especially the Rhine. We 're miles ahead of our transport and most of the artillery. You know we 're tired out—ought to have been relieved days ago. The Colonel says we 're going so fast the relieving Division can't overtake us. A regular Staff yarn. . . .'

The motor despatch-rider had turned his machine, and chugged off into the gloom. Ellerton sighed at Baron's eloquent complaints. He more than half shared his pessimism about the duration of the war, though the Boches certainly were retreating in undisguised panic, and had made no attempt at a real stand for days. Still, you never knew with the old Boche. He had blown bridges, culverts, cross-roads, with exemplary military destructiveness. Every railway they passed had each alternative rail most neatly blown about six inches—the maximum of destructiveness with the minimum of effort. The whole railway would have to be re-laid. They must be forty to sixty miles from rail-head. It certainly was impossible to fight even one more big battle at present. . . . Ellerton sighed again.

'I suppose you 're right. Probably they don't want us to overrun our objective, and get involved in a pre-

mature action. I 'll go myself and tell Warburton to bring his platoon back.'

' All right. I 'd better go and see the Colonel again. He told me we were to continue the pursuit at dawn—I expect he 's changed his mind, too ! '

And the agitated little man, still occasionally pushing up his helmet, plodded off irritatedly.

Ellerton found Warburton, a round-faced, yellow-haired young man, with a perpetual frown of perplexity, giving verbose orders to a couple of sections.

' Hullo, Ellerton. I say, there must be a Boche machine-gun post somewhere to our front. I sent out a couple of patrols, and Corporal Eliot was killed—damn nuisance, one of our best N.C.O.'s. I 'm going out with a couple of sections, to try and snaffle the post after dark.'

' No, you 're not ! There 's an order from Division just arrived—we 're to retire behind the Mons-Maubeuge road.'

' What on earth for ? '

' God knows. But that 's the order.'

Warburton swore copiously.

' And my best corporal 's killed ! '

' C ' Company officers bivouacked that night in a cold empty cottage, which however had the luxury of a roof and of an undamaged board-floor to sleep on. Iron rations. Baron denounced the lack of organisation in the A.S.C., with several pointed hints to Warburton, the Company Mess President. The night was very cold, and they shivered as they lay on the

floor in their trench coats. Gusts of raw, damp air flowed into the room each time one of the sleeping officers was roused to relieve his predecessor on duty.

Ellerton took the two to four watch, after nearly four hours' sleep. Seated on the only available chair, in front of a biscuit-box table with a guttering candle stuck in a bottle, the conscientious Baron was drearily bowed asleep over masses of Situation Reports, Ration Indents, Casualty Reports, and letters from and to relatives of men killed. Baron's kindliness and paper fever involved him in long carefully docketed correspondence with the relatives of the dead; once, five minutes before zero hour, Ellerton had found him in a dug-out agitatedly explaining by letter to an indignant parent why the pocket-knife was missing from the effects of a man killed two months before.

'Why don't you lie down, Baron? You 're worn out, old man, and you 're only nodding asleep there. Chuck that silly bumph, and go to sleep.'

Baron sat up with a jerk.

'Wha 's time?'

'Two o'clock.'

'Tch, tch! And I *must* get all this done before dawn!'

Ellerton knew it was useless to argue further, and slowly got into his equipment. As he shut the door, he saw Baron was already beginning to nod again.

And Baron was not the only one who was tired. The whole battalion was tired, tired to a mortal indifference. The last newspapers they had seen, dating from the end of October, informed them they had won splendid

victories. It was, of course, interesting to get news about this big war which was going on, but they were too much absorbed in their own job, and far too tired to give much attention to it.

The cold wind smote Ellerton's cheek as he stumbled wearily along, with a weary silent runner behind him. Overhead a wasted-looking moon sagged westwards, encumbered by heavy clouds. Ellerton was leg-weary, body-weary, mind-weary, heart-weary. So sick of the war that he had ceased to think about it, and simply plodded on, resigned to an eternity of trench duty, hopeless about the infernal thing ever ending. Even the sudden return to open warfare, even the large map outside Divisional Headquarters, almost daily marked with new bulging advances in blue pencil, failed to alter him. Shut inside the blinkers of duty as an infantry officer, his intelligence was dead or somnolent—he almost believed Baron's imbecility about having to get to Berlin, which was only Baron's conscientious feeling that the routine even of war must be carried out to the end predetermined by 'the authorities.' Who the devil are 'the authorities,' though, Ellerton reflected as he stumbled along? God knows. Anyhow it doesn't matter. Nothing matters. Not a button. And talking of buttons, I must tell that idiot, Fenchurch, that he forgot again to sew that fly-button on my slacks. . . .

He came to the first of the three sentry positions, established about fifty yards from the main road. Damn funny not having any trenches, so awkward and unprotected. The sentries, too, felt awkward without

the customary fire-step and parapet. . . . You never knew what might happen with the old Boche. Yet it was very quiet, unbelievably quiet. But for an occasional Verey light and a little artillery fire to the left they might have been on night ops. in England.

'Anything to report, corporal?'

'No, sir, all quiet, sir.'

'Let the men rest as much as you can.'

'Very good, sir.'

'You know we 're being relieved to-morrow?'

''Eard that tale before, sir.'

'Well, there 's another Division bivouacked just behind us. Captain Baron saw one of their officers at Battalion H.Q. I think we 've earned a few days' rest.'

'Men are worn out, sir, and them iron rations . . .'

'I know, I know, but they 'll get hot food to-morrow, or the Q.M. shall perish. . . .'

'Very good, sir.'

'Good-night, corporal.'

'Good-night, sir.'

Undoubtedly it was amazingly quiet. Ellerton peered through the dim air—not a light, not a bullet, not a shell, not a sound from the German army. A surprise attack pending? Or had they retreated faster than ever, and fallen back on another prepared line? True, their Siegfried line had proved a wash-out, a mere rough trench with scarcely any wire. But still, you never knew. He went back to Number 1 post, and warned the corporal to keep a good watch, and instantly report anything unusual. He repeated this order to the other posts.

How still it was! How slowly the time went! Only twenty minutes gone. The runner stumbled heavily and nearly fell. Poor devil, tired out.

'Tired, Hogbin?'

'Yessir, a bit, sir.'

'All right, go and sleep. It 's so quiet I shan't need you.'

'Very good, sir, thank y' very much, sir.'

He listened to the sound of the man's heavy hob-nailed boots on the cobbled side-road. How awkward-animal a man is when he 's tired out. Good to be alone, though. Ellerton established a sort of beat for himself, more to keep awake than for any other reason. Quiet and cold. Nothing to report. The moon suddenly jumped into clear sky from behind a heavy cloud. He gazed eagerly in the direction of the enemy. Nothing but dim fields and the vague forms of trees. To the right was a sort of round valley, half-filled with very white mist, so level that it looked like cream in a large brown bowl. . . .

He continued his beat.

II

An hour after dawn next morning, Ellerton was marching with Warburton at the head of Number 1 platoon on their way back to rest billets. Baron came jolting along on the company Rosinante, which his prudent sedentary spirit preferred to the more sprightly animals offered by the transport officer. Ellerton fell out of the ranks to speak to him.

'Just going along to Batt. H.Q.,' explained Baron. 'I 'm taking those reports—whoa! you brute!' (the horse had tossed its head)—'the runners are so careless.'

He patted his buttoned pocket, which was bulging with documents.

'And, by the bye, Ellerton, I ought to strafe you. In the casualty report for the last action, you didn't mark how the men were hit. Don't you remember there 's an order that casualties are to be marked " G " for gas, " S " for shell, " B " for bullet, and so on?'

Ellerton laughed.

'Rot! How the hell are we to know? We can't stay behind to discover how each casualty happens. If Whitehall are so keen on statistics, why the hell don't they come and collect 'em themselves?'

'All very well, old man, but an order 's an order.'

'So long, old man, get us a good billet.'

'So long.'

Baron bobbed off uneasily ahead, and Ellerton rejoined the first platoon. The men were singing one of the worst of their drawling songs :

'It 's a long, loong traiiil a-wiinding,
Into the laaand of my dreeeeams,
Where the niightingaaales are siinging . . .'

Suddenly, round a bend in the road, appeared a Staff Officer on a chestnut, as handsome and fiery as Baron's Rosinante was ugly and tame. Ellerton hastily called the men to attention, but before they could unsling their rifles for the salute the Staff Officer waved his hand and shouted :

' Armistice was signed at six this morning, and comes into force at eleven. The war 's over.'

A languid cheer came from the platoon.

' Oo-ray.'

And then, as the Staff man rode on, they at once continued :

' It 's a long, looong traiiil a-wiiinding . . .'

Ellerton was amazed at their phlegm. He turned his head aside so that Warburton should not see his emotion. So it was over, really over, incredibly over ! In a flash a dozen scenes of the war leaped into his mind, a dozen occasions when death had seemed inevitable, memories of the interminable months when it had seemed impossible that the war could ever end. . . . It was like the gift of another life ! It *was* another life. Instead of living from minute to minute with the menace perpetually staring at you, instead of getting up and lying down with death . . . Incredible.

He would not be killed. Warburton and Baron and Hogbin would not be killed. No one else in the battalion would be killed. Incredible. A thrill of almost painful exultation went through him, as if the first rush of returning hope and vitality were a hurt like blood flowing back into a crushed limb. Then with a worse, almost unendurable pang, he thought of the millions of men of many nations who would never feel that ecstasy, who were gone for ever, rotting in desolate battlefields and graveyards all over the world. He turned his head further from Warburton to hide the tears which, to his amazement, came into his eyes.

Would they dare to ' maffick ' in London and Paris ? Probably. Well, let them. A lot of cheering idiots in an unlimited cemetery would make a good emblem for the first quarter of the twentieth century. Perhaps the men's quietness and lack of demonstration meant that they too felt this—they were extraordinarily quick now in refusing to be taken in by humbug. Ellerton (like them) was indeed quietly and deeply grateful that the long torture was over, but neither he nor they could join with the Captains and the Kings in shouting for the Victory. The only victory that had resulted was in fact the victory of death over life, of stupidity over intelligence, of hatred over humanity. It must never happen again, never, never. It was the duty of the survivors to the dead so to warn the world that this abomination never occurred again. Even the dullest of them would see that and help. He turned to Warburton :

' Well, what are you thinking about it all ? '

From the more than ever perplexed frown on Warburton's babyish face, Ellerton expected some revelation of deep emotion, perhaps a solemn pledge to labour for the abolition of war. What Warburton said, however, was :

' I 'm wondering if Baron 'd lend me the horse. If I could ride over to the Divisional Canteen I might be able to get some better grub for us.'

AT ALL COSTS

AT ALL COSTS

I

'BLAST!'

Captain Hanley, commanding 'B' Company, stumbled over a broken duck-board and fell forward against the side of the trench. His tilted helmet shielded his face, but the trench wall felt oozy and soggy to his naked hand as he tried to steady himself.

'Mind that hole, Parker.'

'Very good, sir.'

He felt wet mud soaking through his breeches above the short gum boots, and his right sleeve was wet to the elbow. He fumbled in his gas-bag, also wet with slimy mud, to see that the mask-goggles were unbroken. O.K., but he swore again with a sort of exasperated groan over the crashing bruise on his right knee.

'Are you 'it, sir?'

'No, I only fell in that mucking hole again. I 've told the Ser'ant-Major umpteen times to get it mended. One of these days the Brigadier 'll fall into it and then there 'll be hell to pay. Help me find my torch. I hope the bloody thing isn't broken.'

The two men groped in the darkness, fingering the slimy mud and tilted broken duck-boards. Suddenly they crashed helmets.

'Sorry, sir.'

'All right, sorry.'

'Doesn't seem to be 'ere, sir.'

'Never mind, we 'll look for it in the morning.'

They stumbled on cautiously. The trench was very deep (old German communication), very dark, very shell-smashed, very muddy. A black, heavy-clouded night, about an hour before dawn. Occasionally a strange ghostly glow appeared as a distant Verey light was fired, and made for them a near dark horizon of tumbled shell-tormented parapet. The trench swerved, and Hanley dimly made out the shape of three crosses —Canadians. Half-way. Fifty yards further on was another turn, where a piece of corrugated iron revetment had been flung on to the top of the high parapet, where its jagged outline looked like a grotesque heraldic dragon.

It had been an ideal night for gas and would be an ideal dawn—heavy, windless, foggy—for a surprise attack. Hanley had been up and about the trenches most of the night. Since that rotten gas attack on the Somme, where he lost twenty-three men, he took no risks. Up and down the trenches, warning the N.C.O.'s to look out for gas. Now he was on the way to his advance posts. Be there in case of an attack. . . .

Splash, squelch, splodge. Somebody coming towards them.

'Who are you?'

'Mockery.'

'Is that the word to-night, Parker?'

'Yessir.'

'That you, Hanley?' Voice coming towards them.

'Hullo, Williams. I thought you were in Hurdle Alley?'

'I was, but I thought I 'd have a look at these posts. They 're a hell of a way from the front line.'

'I know. Damn this organisation in depth. Are they all right?'

'Yes. He sent over about forty minnies, Ser'ant Cramp said, but no casualties. He was flipping over some of those flying pineapples when I left.'

From their own back areas came an irregular but ceaseless crashing of artillery. Heavy shells shrilled high above them as they swooped at enemy communications and night parties.

'Strafing the old Boche a good bit to-night,' said Williams.

'Yes, it 's been quite heavy. Might almost be a wind-up at H.Q.'

'Boche are very quiet to-night.'

'Yes; well, cheerio. Tell Thompson to keep our breakfast hot; and don't stand down until I get back.'

'Right you are, cheerio.'

Hanley visited his posts. They were established in a ruined and unrepaired German trench at the foot of a long forward slope. This had once been the British front line, but was now held only by scattered observation posts, with the main front line several hundred yards to the rear. The British bombardment increased, and the shrill scream of the passing shells was almost continuous. Verey lights and rockets went up from the German lines. Hanley cursed the loss of his

torch—damned difficult to get about without it. He came to the first post.

'You there, Ser'ant Tomlinson?'

A figure moved in the darkness.

'Yes, sir.'

'Anything to report?'

'No, sir.'

'Mr. Williams said there were some minnies and pineapples.'

'Yes, sir, but it 's very quiet, sir.'

'Um. Any patrols still out?'

'No, sir, all in.'

'Very well. Carry on, ser'ant.'

'Very good, sir.'

Much the same news at the other posts. Hanley returned to Number 1 post, nearest the communication trench, at dawn. The men were standing to. Hanley got on the fire-step in a shell-smashed abandoned bay, and watched with his glasses slung round his neck. The artillery had died down to a couple of batteries, when the first perceptible lightening of the air came. Hanley felt cold in his mud-soaked breeches and tunic. Very gradually, very slowly, the darkness dissipated, as if thin imperceptible veils were being rolled up in a transformation scene. The British wire became visible. In the trembling misty light No Man's Land seemed alive with strange shapes and movements. Hanley pressed cold hands on his hot eyes, puffy with lack of sleep. He looked again. Yes, yes, surely, they were climbing over the parapet and lying down in front. He seized a rifle leaning against the trench, loaded with

an S.O.S. rocket bomb. Funny Sergeant Tomlinson and the men were so silent. Perhaps he was imagining things, the same old dawn-mirage of movement which had been responsible for so many false alarms. He waited a couple of minutes with closed eyes, and then looked very carefully through his glasses. Silly ass! The men coming over the parapets were the German wire pickets. He put the rifle down, glad the men had not seen him, and went round the traverse to Sergeant Tomlinson and Parker.

'Stand to for another twenty minutes, ser'ant, and then let two men from Number 2 post and two from Number 4 go and get your breakfasts.'

'Very good, sir.'

On the way back Hanley found his torch—the glass bulb was smashed; like most things in this bloody war, he reflected. Well, they 'd passed another dawn without an attack—that was something. He got on a fire-step in the main line and took another look. A cloudy but rainless morning. Not a sign of life in the enemy trenches, scarcely a sound. He gave the order to stand down, and sent Parker to join his section for breakfast.

The company dug-out was a large one, built as the headquarters of a German battalion. It was remarkably lousy. Hanley threw his torch, revolver-belt and helmet on his wire and sacking bed, and sat down on a box beside a small table laid with four knives and forks on a newspaper. He felt tired, too tired even to enjoy the hot bacon and eggs which formed the infantry

officers' best meal of the day. The three subalterns chatted. Hanley pushed away his plate and stood up.

'I 'm going to turn in. Tell the signaller to wake me if anything important happens.'

'Right-o.'

Hanley hung up his revolver and helmet, arranged his pack as a pillow, swung himself still booted and wet on to the bed, and wrapped himself in a blanket. For a few minutes he lay drowsily, listening to the throb of blood in his head and the quiet mutter of the other officers. His eyes still ached even when shut. He drowsed, then half awoke as he remembered that he had not indented for enough ammunition, decided that could wait, and—was dead asleep.

II

Hanley opened his eyes and lay quite still. Why were they talking so loudly? In a flash he was wide awake and swung up, sitting with his legs over the side of the bed. The Colonel. Damn! Being found asleep like that! And, of course, the Colonel would not know that he had been up and down the line all night. Damn! Well, never mind. He gave one dab with both hands at his rumpled hair, and stood up.

'Good-morning, sir.'

'Oh, good-morning, Hanley. Williams said you 'd been up all night. Sorry to disturb you.'

'Quite all right, sir.'

A large-scale trench map of their sector was spread

on the table, half concealing another smaller scale artillery map of the whole district.

'Just sit down for a few minutes, Hanley. I 've got important news.'

The other officers grouped beside them, gazing at the Colonel and listening.

'Very important news,' the Colonel went on in a slow voice, 'and not particularly pleasant, I 'm afraid.'

He pulled a neat bundle of documents from his pocket, opened one labelled 'SECRET AND CONFIDENTIAL' and spread it on the table. They all gazed at it—the inexorable decree of Fate—and then again at the Colonel, the agent of that Fate, of all their fates.

'That is a confidential document from Corps Headquarters. I 'll tell you briefly what it is, and you can look it over afterwards. The night before last the Division on our left made an identification raid, and captured a prisoner. From this and other information it seems certain that we shall be attacked—to-morrow morning—about an hour before dawn.'

Each of the four company officers drew a short imperceptible breath, glanced at each other and then quickly away. Hanley leaned his elbow on the table.

'Yes, sir?'

'It will be a surprise attack, with a very short but violent preliminary bombardment.' The Colonel spoke very slowly and deliberately, looking down absently at the map, and gently twisting the lowest button of his tunic with the fingers of his right hand. 'All reports confirm our information, and the Air Force report great

enemy activity behind the lines. You heard the bombardment of their communications last night.'

'Yes, sir.'

There was complete silence in the dug-out, as the Colonel paused. A pile of tin plates fell with a clatter in the servants' compartment. None of the officers moved. Hanley noticed how clean the Colonel's gas-bag was.

'There will probably be twenty to thirty German Divisions in the attack, which will be on a sixteen-mile front. We are about in the middle.'

'Yes, sir.'

The Colonel moved on his box. He stretched out all the fingers of his left hand, and tapped rapidly on the table alternately with the stretched little finger and thumb.

'The Canadian Corps and several reserve Divisions are being brought up at once to occupy position about five miles to our rear. They cannot fully man the whole battle line before three to-morrow afternoon. Our duty is to delay the enemy advance until that time or longer. Our positions must be held at all costs, to the last man.'

There was a long silence. The Colonel ceased drumming with his fingers, and looked at them.

'Have you any questions to ask?'

'Yes, sir. Am I to leave my posts out?'

'Two hours before dawn, you will withdraw them to strengthen your own line. One section, with a sergeant and a subaltern, will remain at the end of the communication trench. The subaltern will be a volun-

teer. His duty is to fire a green light when the German attacking line reaches him. The artillery barrage will then shorten to defend your line. You, Hanley, will have a Verey-light pistol loaded with a red light, and you will fire it when the first German jumps into your trench. The object, of course, is to inform the artillery when they must shorten the defensive barrage.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Any more questions?'

'No, sir, not for the moment.'

'You 'll arrange with your officers, Hanley, as to which shall volunteer to fire the green light.'

'Very good, sir.'

'And I want you to come to a conference of company officers with the Brigadier at Battalion Headquarters this afternoon.'

'Very good, sir. What time?'

'Oh, make it three o'clock.'

'Very well, sir.'

The Colonel rose.

'You know your battle positions, of course; but we 'll discuss that this afternoon. Oh, by the bye, I 'm sending up green envelopes for every one in the company this morning. The letters must be sent down by runner at four. Of course, not a word about the attack must be mentioned either to N.C.O.'s or men until after the letters have gone.'

'Of course, sir.'

'And—er—naturally you will not mention the matter yourselves.'

'No, sir, of course not.'

'All right. Good-bye. Will you come along with me, Hanley? I should like to walk round your main defence line with you.'

'Very good, sir.'

There was silence in the dug-out. They could hear the Colonel and Hanley scuffling up the low dug-out stairs. Williams tapped a cigarette on his case, and bent down to light it at the candle burning on the table. He puffed a mouthful of smoke, with a twist to his lips.

'Well, that 's that. Napoo, eh?'

'Looks like it.'

'What about a drink?'

'Right-o.'

Williams shouted:

'Thomp-sooon.'

From the distance came a muffled: 'Sir?'

A Tommy appeared in the doorway.

'Bring us a bottle of whisky and the mugs.'

'Very good, sir.'

III

All that day Hanley was in a state of dazed hebetude, from which he emerged from time to time. He felt vaguely surprised that everything was so much as usual. There were sentries at their posts, runners going along the trenches, an occasional aeroplane overhead, a little artillery—just the ordinary routine of trench warfare. And yet within twenty-four hours their trenches would be obliterated, he and thousands with him would be

dead, obliterated, unless by some chance, some odd freak, he was made prisoner. He heard repeated over and over again in his head the words : ' Position must be held at all costs, position must be held at all costs.' He felt suddenly angry. Held at all costs ! All jolly fine and large to write from the safety of Montreuil, but what about those who had to make good such dramatic sentiments with their lives ? The front was ridiculously denuded of men—why, his own under-strength company held very nearly a battalion front, and had a flank to guard as well. If they fought like madmen and stood to the last man, they might hold up three waves—an hour at most. And they were asked to hold out for nearly twelve hours ! Ridiculous, good God, ridiculous.

He found the Colonel shaking him by the arm.

' What 's the matter with you, Hanley ? You don't seem to hear what I 'm saying.'

' I beg your pardon, sir. I——'

' I think you ought to bring a Lewis gun up to this point. You 've got an excellent field of fire here.'

' Very good, sir.'

Hanley noted the change to be made in his field service message book. They walked on, and the Colonel made various other suggestions—so many orders—which Hanley duly noted. The Colonel paused at the corner of the communication trench leading to Battalion Headquarters. He waved to the orderlies to stand apart.

' We 'll discuss the general plan of defence at the conference this afternoon. Make a note of anything

that occurs to you, any information you want, and bring it up.'

'Right, sir.'

The Colonel hesitated a moment.

'It 's a very difficult position, Hanley, I know, but we must all do our duty.'

'Of course, sir.'

'I shall lead the counter-attack of the Reserve Company myself.'

'Yes, sir.'

'A great deal depends on our putting up a good show.'

'Yes, sir.'

'I suggest you go round to the dug-outs and speak to all your men this evening. Put a good face on it, you know. Tell them we are all prepared, and shall easily beat off the attack, and that reinforcements are being hurried up to relieve us. And above all impress upon them that these trenches *must* be held at all costs.'

'Very good, sir.'

The Colonel held out his hand.

'I may not have another opportunity to speak to you in private. Good-bye, and the best of luck. I know you 'll do your duty.'

'Thank you, sir. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye.'

When Hanley stooped under the low entrance of the dug-out chamber, the three subalterns were seated round the table with flushed cheeks, talking loudly. The whisky bottle was more than half empty. A

sudden spurt of anger shot through him. He strode up to the table, and knocked the cork level with the top of the bottle-neck with one hard smack of his hand. He spoke harshly :

' What 's this nonsense ? '

Williams, the eldest of the three subalterns, answered, half defiantly, half ashamedly :

' We 're only having a drink. Where 's the harm ? '

' Only a drink ! Before lunch ! Now, look here, you fellows. The whisky that 's left in that bottle is all that 's going to be drunk in this Mess between now and dawn to-morrow. Understand ? One of the damned stupidities of this damned war is that every officer thinks it 's the thing to be a boozer. It isn't. The men don't drink. They get a tablespoonful of rum a day. Why should we make sots of ourselves ? We 're responsible for their lives. See ? And we 're responsible for these trenches. We 've got to leave 'em on stretchers or stay here and manure 'em. See ? We 've got a bloody rotten job ahead of us, a stinking rotten job, and I wish those who ordered it were here to carry out their own damned orders. But they 're not. Not bloody likely. But the people at home trust us. We 're responsible to them, first and foremost. We took on the job, and we 've got to carry it out. And carry it out dead bloody sober. Got me ? '

The men were silent, looking sheepishly at the newspaper on the table with its wet rings from mug-bottoms. Hanley took an empty mug, and tossed some of the whisky from Williams's mug into it.

'Drink up. Here 's hell!'

They drank.

Hanley shouted:

'Thomp-soooon!'

Thompson appeared in the door.

'Take those mugs away.'

'Very good, sir.'

'How many bottles of whisky have you?'

'Three, sir.'

'Bring them here, and a sandbag.'

'Very good, sir.'

Hanley scribbled a few words in his message book, and tore out the slip. He put the bottles in the sandbag.

'Parker!'

'Sir?'

Parker in his turn appeared.

'Take that sandbag down to Battalion H.Q. Give it one of the officers, and bring back his signed receipt.'

'Very good, sir.'

The other officers exchanged glances. Williams, who had his back turned to Hanley, made a grimace of derision. The others frowned at him.

Hanley was busy throughout the day, making arrangements, giving orders, attending the conference—which lasted a long time—and going round to speak to the men. He only had time to write a very brief letter to his wife, enclosing one still briefer for his father. He wrote calmly, almost coldly in his effort to avoid emotion and self-pity. He even managed to squeeze

out a joke for each letter. As soon as they were finished the two letters vanished in the open sandbag containing the company mail, and the runner started at once for Headquarters. Somehow it was a relief to have those letters gone. The last links with England, with life, were broken. Finished, done with, almost forgotten. It was easier to carry on now.

But was it? There was that damned business of the volunteer subaltern. Hanley rubbed his clenched fist against his cheek, and found that he had forgotten to shave. He called his servant, and told him to bring some hot water in a cigarette tin. Shaving for the last time. Hardly worth it, really. Still, must be done. Morale, and all that.

He shaved carefully. One of the subalterns went out to relieve the officer on duty. One was asleep. Williams was writing a situation report. Hanley bit the back of his hand hard, then shoved both hands in his breeches pockets, looking at Williams's bent head.

'Williams!'

Williams looked up.

'Yes?'

'There 's this business of the volunteer to——'

'Oh, that 's all settled.'

'Settled!'

'Yes. I 'm going.'

'You 're going! But you 've only been married two months.'

'Yes. That 's why I thought I 'd like to get it over as quickly as possible.'

'But I was going to put your platoon at the end of

Hurdle Alley. You might just be able to get back to Battalion, you know.'

'And feel a swine for the rest of my life—which would be about two hours? Thanks. No, I 'd rather get it over, if you don't mind, Hanley.'

'Oh, all right.'

They were silent. Then Hanley said:

'Well, I 'll just go and talk to the men . . . er . . . So long.'

'So long.'

IV

All working parties were cancelled to give the men as much rest as possible, but there was inevitably a lot of extra work, bringing up ammunition, rations, and water. As soon as dusk fell the whole reserve company and some pioneers came up to strengthen the wire. The British artillery was ceaselessly active. Hardly a shot came from the German lines—an ominous sign.

After dinner Hanley lay down to sleep for a few hours. Must be as fresh as possible. He wrapped the blanket up to his chin, and shut his eyes. The other three off duty were lying down, too. But Hanley could not sleep. It was all so strange, so strange, and yet so ordinary. Just like any other night, and yet the last night. Inevitably the last night? How could they escape, with orders to hold on at all costs? Half of them would go in the bombardment, which would be terrific. Bombs, bullets, and bayonets would finish off the rest. The dug-outs would be wrecked with bombs and high-explosive charges. A few of the

wounded might be picked up later. A few of the men might escape down Hurdle Alley after the officers were gone. But no, the N.C.O.'s could be relied on to hold out to the last. They were done for, napoo. No après la guerre for *them*—bon soir, toodle-oo, good-byeeee. The silly words repeated and repeated in his brain until he hated them. He opened his eyes and gazed at the familiar dug-out. His wire bed was at an angle to the others, and he could see the shapes of Williams and the two other officers muffled up silent in their blankets—as still and silent as they would be in twenty-four hours' time. There was the candle burning in the holder roughly bent from a tin biscuit-box. The flame was absolutely steady in the airless, earthy smelling dug-out. There were the boxes for seats, the table with its maps, tins of cigarettes, chits, and the five mugs beside the whisky bottle for the last parting drink. The bare, murky walls of chalk were damp and clammy-looking with condensed breath. The revolvers, helmets, and gas-bags were hung at the bed-heads. He listened to the other men breathing, and felt an absurd regret at leaving the dug-out to be smashed. After all, that and other dug-outs like it were the only home they had known for months and months. Breaking up the happy home. He became aware that he felt a bit sickish, that he had been feeling like that for several hours, and pretending not to.

He gently drew his wrist from under the blanket, and looked at his luminous watch. Eleven thirty-five. He had to be up at two—must get some sleep. With almost a start he noticed that Williams was looking at

his own watch in the same stealthy way. So he couldn't sleep either. Poor devil. Profoundly, almost insanely in love with that wife of his. Poor devil. But still, for the matter of that, so was Hanley in love with his wife. His heart seemed to turn in his body, and he felt an acute pain in the muscles above it as he suddenly realised fully that it was all over, that he would never see her again, never feel her mouth pressed to his, never again touch her lovely, friendly body. He clutched his hand over his face until it hurt to prevent himself from groaning. God, what bloody agony. O God, he 'd be a mass of dead rotting decay, and she 'd still be young and beautiful and alert and desirable, O God, and her life would run on, run on, there 'd be all the grief and the sorrowing for her and tears in a cold widowed bed, O God, but the years would run on and she 'd still be young and desirable, and somebody else would want her, some youngster, some wangler, and youth and her flesh and life would be clamorous, and her bed would no longer be cold and widowed. O God, God. Something wet ran down his cheek. Not a tear, but the cold clammy sweat from his forehead. God, what agony.

Hanley suddenly sat up. If he was suffering like that, Williams must be suffering, too. Better to get up and pretend to talk than lie and agonise like that. He got out of bed. Williams raised his head :

' What 's up ? It isn't two, is it ? '

The other men looked up, too, showing that neither of them had been asleep. Hanley shivered and rubbed his hands to warm them in the chill dug-out.

'No, only five to twelve. But I couldn't sleep. Hope I don't disturb you. Benson must be relieved in a few minutes,' he added inconsequently.

The other three rolled out of bed, and stood stretching and rubbing their hands.

'Too cold to sleep in this damned damp place,' said one of them.

'What about a drink?'

'If you have it now, you can't have it later on,' said Hanley. 'Better wait until two.'

Williams put on his equipment and helmet and went up to relieve Benson. The others sat on the boxes trying to talk. Benson came down.

'Anything on?' asked Hanley casually.

'Lots of lights, ordinary strafing on their side. A hell of a bombardment from our side.'

'Perhaps if they see we 've got wind of it, they 'll postpone the attack?' suggested the youngest officer.

'Rot,' said Benson. 'They know jolly well that all this part of the line has been denuded to feed the Fifth Army. They 'll attack all right.'

They were silent. Hanley looked at his watch. Five past twelve. How damnably slowly the time went; and yet these were their last minutes on earth. He felt something had to be done.

'Let 's have a hand at bridge.'

'What, to-night, now?'

'Well, why not? It 's no good sitting here grumping like owls, and you don't suggest a prayer meeting, do you?'

The last suggestion was met with oaths of a forcible

nature. Hanley cleared the table and threw down the cards.

'Cut for deal.'

Just before two, Hanley slipped into his breeches pocket the ten francs he had won, and stood up. He put on trench coat and muffler, tried his broken torch for about the twentieth time, then threw it down disgustedly, and fitted on his equipment. The subaltern who was to relieve Williams on trench duty was already dressed and waiting. Hanley put on his helmet, and turned to the others.

'I 'll come round and see you after you 've taken up battle positions; but if by any chance I don't see you again—cheerio.'

'Cheerio.'

They found Williams, his runner, and a sergeant waiting in the trench outside the dug-out entrance.

'Anything doing?'

'Nothing particular. I went on patrol. Their wire 's got gaps cut, with knife-rests in the gaps, all the way along.'

'Um.'

'Lot of signal rockets, too.'

'I see. Our artillery seems to have ceased altogether.'

'Saving ammunition for the show.'

'Be more sensible to strafe now while the Boche is taking up battle positions.'

'Oh well, that 's the Staff's job, not ours.'

V

Hanley, Williams, the sergeant, two runners, started for the outpost line. The trench was drier, the night not so dark, with faint stars mistily gleaming among light clouds. Weather clearing up—just the Boche's luck again. The five men moved along without talking, absorbed partly in a strange anxious preoccupation, partly in keeping upright on the slippery trench. Hanley and Williams, of course, knew the full extent of their danger, had faced the ultimate despair, passed beyond revolt or hope. The sergeant still hoped—that he might be wounded and taken prisoner. The two men only knew they were 'in for a show.' All were dry-mouthed, a little sickish with apprehension, a little awkward in all their movements; the thought of deserting their posts never even occurred to them.

They passed the three Canadian crosses, distinctly outlined on the quiet sky; then the dragon piece of corrugated iron. At the end of the communication trench they found waiting the men from the four posts, under a sergeant. Hanley spoke in low tones—there might be advance patrols lying just outside their wire.

'All your men present, ser'ant?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Right. You know your orders. See that each section joins its own platoon, and then report to your own platoon commander. Don't waste time.'

'Very good, sir.'

The line of men filed past them in the darkness. For the hundredth time Hanley noticed the curious

pathos of fatigue in these silent moving figures—the young bodies somehow tired to age and apathy. When they had gone he took Williams a little aside.

'If I were you, I should see that each of you occupies a separate bay. Get in the first bay yourself, then the runner, then the sergeant. They won't dare try to bolt back past you. Besides—er—there 's more chance if you 're spread out.'

'I was wondering what happens if all three of us are knocked out before the Boche actually gets into the trench, and so no green light is fired ? '

'Oh, we must risk that. Besides, there are similar volunteer parties on every company front.'

'I see.'

'I took a compass bearing from the fire-step outside Company H.Q. yesterday, so I shan't miss your light. I expect they 'll be on us ten minutes later. Perhaps we 'll beat off the first two or three attacks.'

'Yes. Perhaps.'

They were silent. Then Hanley made an effort.

'Well, good-bye, old man. Best of luck.'

'Best of luck, good-bye.'

They were too shy and English even to shake hands.

It was past three when Hanley and Parker got back to their own line, and found the whole company standing to in battle positions. Hanley kept his signallers on the first floor of the big dug-out. He sent off to Battalion Headquarters the code message which meant they were in battle positions and all ready. He took a candle and went down to the lower dug-out, where

they had spent so many nights. It looked barer and damper than ever, empty except for the bare sacking beds, the boxes, the table.

Outside in the trench the air was moist and fresh. He took two Verey pistols, one loaded with green, one with red, and laid them on either side of him on the parapet. Hanley was at the extreme left of the bay, with two riflemen to his right. Twenty yards to his left was the communication trench leading to the outpost line, now blocked with wire and knife-rests, and guarded by a bombing section.

A signaller came up from the dug-out with a message. Hanley went down and read it by the light of a candle. He noticed the bowed back and absorbed look of a signaller tapping out a message on a Fullerphone. The message he had received simply reiterated the order that their positions were to be held at all costs. Hanley felt angry, screwed up the piece of paper and stuffed it in his pocket. Damn them, how many more times did they think that order had to be given? He returned to the trench, and resumed his watch.

3.50 A.M. One battery of German guns languidly firing on back areas—pretence that all was as usual.

3.52 A.M. Signal rockets all along the German line. Then silence.

3.55 A.M. Two miles to his right a fierce bombardment, stretching over several miles. The battle had begun.

3.57 A.M. Two miles to his left another bombard-

ment. The British artillery on their own front opened up a defensive barrage.

4 A.M. With a terrific crash, which immediately blotted out the roar of the other bombardments, the German artillery on their own front came into action. Hanley half recoiled. He had been in several big bombardments, and thought he had experienced the utmost limit of artillery. But this was more tremendous, more hellish, more appalling than anything he had experienced. The trench of the outpost line was one continuous line of red, crashing trench mortars and shells. The communication trench was plastered with five-nines. Shells were falling all along their own line—he heard the sharp cry 'Stretcher-bearer!' very faintly from somewhere close at hand.

The confusion and horror of a great battle descended on him. The crash of shells, the roar of the guns, the brilliant flashes, the eerie piercing scream of a wounded man, the rattle of the machine guns, the Lewis guns, the two riflemen beside him madly working the bolts of their rifles and fumbling as with trembling hands they thrust in a fresh clip of cartridges—all somehow perceived, but thrust aside in his intense watch. A green light went up about half a mile to the left, then another a little nearer. Hanley stared more intently in the direction of Williams's post—and found himself saying over and over again without knowing he was saying it: 'O God, help him, O God, help him, O God, help him.'

Suddenly two green lights appeared, one fired straight up as a signal—probably Williams—the other almost

along the ground, as if fired at somebody—probably the runner, wounded or in a panic. Sergeant dead, no doubt—Williams and his runner dead, too, by now. Hanley fired a green light. Two minutes later the British barrage shortened.

Hanley grasped the Verey pistol loaded with red. Their turn now.

'Stretcher-bearer, stretcher-bearer!'

Crash! A shell right on their bay.

Hanley staggered, and felt a fearful pain in his right knee where a shell splinter had hit him. In the faint light of dawn he saw vaguely that one of the riflemen lay huddled on the fire-step, leaving his rifle still on the parapet; the other man had been blown backwards into the trench, and lay with his feet grimly and ludicrously caught in a torn piece of revetment. His helmet had been knocked from his head.

Faint pops of bombs to his immediate left—they were coming up the communication trench. He peered into the shell-smashed light of dawn, but saw only smoke and the fierce red flash of explosions.

Suddenly, to his left, he saw German helmets coming up the communication trench—they had passed the wire barrier! He looked to his right—a little knot of Germans had got through the wire—a Lewis gun swept them away like flies. He felt the blood running down his leg.

Somebody was standing beside him. A voice, far off, was speaking:

'Bombing attack beaten off, sir.'

'Very good, carry on.'

' There 's only two of us left, sir.'

' Carry on.'

' Very good, sir.'

More Germans on the right ; another, longer row coming up the communication trench. Then, suddenly, Germans seemed to spring up in every direction. Hanley fired six shots from his Webley at those in front. He saw others falling hit, or jumping into the trench on either side.

A red light shot up straight in the air. A second later two bombs fell in the bay. A torn, crumpled figure collapsed sideways. The Germans re-organised, while the moppers-up did their job.

DESERTER

DESERTER

HARRY WERNER was rather a lonely sort of chap. His mother, with the not-unfounded working-class prejudice against hospitals, insisted that the child should be born in their own squalid home ; and died of puerperal fever in consequence. His father, a railwayman, soon married again. The stepmother was quite decent, but when Harry was seven his father was cut to pieces —accidentally stepped in front of an express train. The widow had quite enough to do to look after her own children, and Harry was parked out with an aunt, a small tradesman's wife with strong but narrow religious views. The aunt informed Harry that the deaths of his parents were the just judgment of God, exhorted him to be God-fearing and respectable, and found him a job in a factory rather before he had reached the statutory age.

He grew up in a chill, lonely way, between the daily eight hours of monotonously repeated, rapid movements among the rattle of machinery, and the prim, stuffy room behind his uncle's shop. He gave his aunt most of his wages for his keep, went to chapel thrice on Sundays, and belonged to the Bible class. He had no friends.

When he was eighteen a strike occurred at the factory. His aunt insisted that he should go to work as usual on the first morning of the strike ; and natur-

ally young Werner was met and interviewed by a strike picket. Their mingled persuasions and threats kept him from the odium of being a blackleg. The picket scout who ' dealt ' with young Werner was a red-faced fellow in the middle twenties, a boisterous ' reformer.' He was known by the uncommon name of ' Bert.' Bert decided that Werner was in need of a little ' propaganda.'

' What d' you do in yer off hours ? '

Harry had to confess that apart from Chapel and Bible classes he mostly ' mucked about,' doing nothing in particular. Bert guffawed noisily :

' Now, you listen ter me, young feller. You bin brought up by a lot 'f muckin' ole aunts what 's put yer wrong. It ain't your fault, and it ain't theirs—it 's the want of their ignerance and their bou'jois mentality. What you want 's a bit o' life, and ter take an intelligent interest in yer own interests. . . .'

Bert was an accomplished revolutionary orator. He lectured Harry for some time on the theme of ' taking an interest in his own interests,' and ended up :

' You stick ter yer real pals in this fight. We 're out to win, an' we 'll win. You see. An' when it 's over I 'll take yer about an' show yer a bit o' real life, I will.'

Bert was the first person who, in Harry's memory, had shown any ' interest in his interests,' or in him as a human being. He hung about with the pickets during the hours he was supposed to be at work, and said nothing to his aunt when she inveighed, supported

by the Holy Scriptures and the *Daily Mail*, against the wickedness of all strikers. His strike pay was insufficient to meet the weekly payments to his aunt, but he used his savings, and when they were gone Bert lent him the money. The strike succeeded. Harry immediately came on to a much higher scale of pay, and began to ' see life ' with Bert.

Young Werner was already so restive under his aunt's régime of Chapel, Bible classes, and *ennui*, that Bert had no very difficult task in converting him to his own very crude and rather vague materialism. Bert's philosophy was innocent of metaphysics and aesthetics ; epistemology did not interest him, and he had no formal logic. Perhaps we might say he was a dogmatic pragmatist. In any event, the main points of his teaching were that all religion was 'bou'jois ideology,' that one should do as little work for as much pay as possible, have a good time, and blast the bosses. Having a good time meant pubs and girls. There were a lot of girls employed at the factory, and Bert introduced Harry to some ' real sporting fillies.'

Inevitably it was not long before the aunt discovered that Harry had gone to the bad. She made herself as unpleasant about it as only a thoroughly good, religious, vinegar-blooded female can. On Bert's suggestion, Harry just up and left ; he found a room and board in Bert's lodgings for about one-half the money he had been paying his altruistic aunt. For the first time in his life Harry felt really happy and exultant when Bert helped him to carry his bundles to his new lodging.

But, as his aunt remarked with pious fretfulness to her friend, Miss Armstrong :

' Fancy 'im turnin' against 'is own flesh an' blood like that, Miss Harmstrong ! It 's hunnatchral. To think of 'im goin' to the bad after all the prayin' I done for 'im an' all the money I 've *squandered* on 'im. But it 's God's judgment, Miss Harmstrong. When 'is pa and ma left the Chapel, I always did say . . .'

Harry became an ardent ' reformer,' and he and Bert were inseparable. Over their beer they discussed the coming revolution ; and they walked out with girls together. The factory girls were not particularly coy, and Werner soon lost any traces of shyness he might have had. He was a good-looking youth in a curly, vulgar way, and made many conquests. He was lucky enough to escape being credited with any of the numerous illegitimate children of the district, and thus avoided being hounded into premature matrimony—a fate which befalls so many young men of his class. Bert would have saved him from this while he was there, but unfortunately for Harry—who had no other friend—Bert's talents were rewarded, and he got some minor job with the ' Union.' Werner felt lonely after Bert left, but he generally had a girl or two to go about with. Bert had showed him all the best places to take girls.

Then came the war. Werner was in no hurry to join up ; but in 1916 he was combed out, and in spite of Bert's letters urging him ' to conscientiously object,'

he went. He disliked his experience in the training-camp, but got through it somehow, and found several willing girls in the small town near which his battalion was encamped. The girls were usually more cynical than he was. When he had spent his savings, and had only his shilling a day he found he was much less popular. Since beer and ' a bit o' skirt ' were the only things Bert's philosophy had taught him to value, he was scarcely sorry when he went overseas in October 1916.

Less than a week in the line convinced him that he did not like the war at all. The philosophy of as little work for as much pay as possible did not function very well there. The pay was little indeed—five francs a week—strikes were unknown, and there were always too many officers and N.C.O.'s poking about to see what a fellow was doing. He volunteered for sanitary man, and then for cook's mate, but the sergeant-major was exceedingly rude, and made use of arguments and oaths unforeseen by the author of ' Das Kapital.' So there was nothing for Werner to do but carry on the ordinary and very uncomfortable life of an infantry Tommy. The beer in the estaminets aroused his sincere contempt, and the few French girls he saw near rest billets seemed all to be otherwise occupied. A very dreary existence.

Then two events occurred. His uncle died and left him a hundred pounds, and he clicked for leave. He was smart enough not to allow the lawyer to transfer the money to his army pay account, from which he could only have drawn it in small sums. As soon as he

got to England, he went to the lawyer's office and received the amount in notes. He then bought a suit of ' civvies,' and took a room in a modest commercial hotel, which to him seemed highly luxurious. He did not call on his aunt.

In a couple of days, of course, he picked up ' a bit o' skirt,' and since it was early September they went to Brighton. The lady, whose name was Emmie, said she always did long for a nice blow at the seaside.

The beer in England, though regrettably weaker than in former days, was still tolerable ; and with beer and his ' bit o' skirt ' Werner had quite a good time. In fact, he would have had a hell of a good time, if he hadn't been reminded by the passing of the days that his fortnight's leave would soon be up. The day before he was due to return to France, he opened his mind to Emmie :

' Well, mate, I reckon I 'll 'ave to be leavin' yer to-morrer.'

' What d' you mean ? '

' Me leave 's up. Got to go back to France.'

' Why, you never told me you was a soldier ! '

' Well, I am. Got all me kit and me rifle wrapped up in that bundle.'

' Oh, 'Arry, you ain't goin' to leave me 'ere ! I thought you was goin' t' marry me ? '

' Well, it ain't no good gettin' married in war-time, is it ? '

Emmie had never for a moment had any delusion about the marriage. She knew that Harry knew perfectly well that she was what the working-classes call a

lady of easy virtue. But she also knew that Harry still possessed over seventy pounds, and she wanted as much of that seventy pounds as she could get. She had discovered that he was ' a bit of a softy ' where women were concerned. He liked them so much that a woman with her wits about her (as Emmie had already confided to the landlady) could just twiddle him round her little finger like, well, like anything. So she began to cry.

' Oh, 'Arry, don't leave me, don't, *don't*. What 'll I do without you ? I know I bin a bad girl, I know I 'ave, but I couldn't 'elp it. I couldn't reelly. Don't leave me, 'Arry, it 'd break me 'eart, it would. If you 'll stick to me, I 'll stick to you, and I 'll be a good, true woman to you, I will. I *do* love you, 'Arry. Don't leave me, oh, *don't* ! '

Werner was a good deal perplexed. After those long months in France without a bit o' skirt, he had found it delicious to be with a woman again. He cared more for Emmie than any one, man or woman, he had ever known. When it came to the point, and she cried and said, ' *Don't* leave me, 'Arry,' and ' I *do* love you, 'Arry,' he just could not go. Of course, he knew the risk he ran in not returning ; but then for the first few days it was not desertion, only overstaying leave. If he left Emmie like that, she 'd go off with some other fellow, and he 'd never see her again.

He decided that he would overstay leave for a few days, go back before it was desertion, and take the punishment. It couldn't be much worse than the line,

and maybe if he did that, she 'd wait for him. He tried to explain the position, but she cried and sobbed and repeated her two catch phrases—and wouldn't listen. How could a poor little woman like her know what was meant by desertion ?

Of course he did not go back next day. And Emmie was so charming that he bought her a new dress and one of those swagger, real lady's, handbags. Quite classy, she looked, all got up to beat the nines.

And day after day went by, until one morning, after a particularly heavy beer bout, Werner awoke and realised with a start that he had not only overstayed his leave . . . He was a deserter.

The landlady had evidently been prying into Werner's bundle, and had become suspicious. After dinner one day she asked for their registration cards. Emmie produced hers. Werner tried to bluff it in the Bert style ; but when the landlady insisted he said he 'd left the card at home with his mother. The landlady naturally did not believe him, and ' turned nasty.'

Werner rapidly got the unpleasant feeling of being hunted. He was afraid every moment that the landlady would send for the police. He perceived suddenly what a dismal and barbaric survival of ancient tyranny a police force is, and expended some of Bert's favourite language on the subject. But that didn't stop the creeps which went down his back every time he passed a policeman in uniform. A man followed them, and Werner feverishly decided he was a plain-clothes detective, until the man came up and asked

with a furtive leer if they 'd like to buy some real spicy postcards. But Werner was getting jumpy, and could stand Brighton no longer. He insisted on leaving. He took the accursed bundle of his kit, which he was afraid to leave behind, and afraid to have with him, and went to the station. Emmie stayed behind to pay the bill, and met him at the train. Not until it started did he breathe freely.

They took lodgings in London as Mr. and Mrs. Werner. They were supposed to be ' looking for work,' but most of their work was done in pubs, cinemas, and eating-houses. Werner's feelings about Emmie were confused, and since he was not a very reflective person he found it hard to disentangle them. In a way he liked her more than ever. He was getting accustomed to her, for one thing ; and she had very affectionate and caressing ways, especially when she wanted something. It was the first time in his life he had ever felt a genuine affection for any one—except for Bert, but that was different. And then Emmie was ' a real sport ' in those more intimate relations which are so important, which form so intangibly unbreakable a bond.

Werner had never liked any woman nearly so much. In fact, Emmie made him forget that he had ever liked any others. Her hold over him was very great. But then sometimes he almost hated her, when she was unreasonably sulky, or said : ' Oh, take yer great paws away, don't be always smarmin' me about.' Something in him mistrusted her. There was a cunning look in her eyes at times when she watched him, or

when she glanced sideways at his purse when he was paying, to see how much money he had left. When the hunted terror of the policeman came upon him, and the dreadful words Deserter, Court Martial, Death Sentence, seemed written in fire before his eyes as he stared sleeplessly into the darkness, while Emmie snored gently at his side, he could almost have killed her. It was her fault, all her fault. O God, why had he been such a fool! Deserter! Court Martial! Damn her, blast her. O God! Deserter! Death Sentence!

In a support trench in France Corporal Rogers whistled cheerily. He was cleaning himself up; and his full equipment, carefully put together, lay on the fire-step beside him. A pal came down the trench.

'Ullo, Rogers, what you so bloody 'appy about?'

'Goin' to Blighty.'

'Lucky swine! Leave?'

'No, escort. But I get one clear day—time to see ma and the roses round the door.'

And the corporal winked. The pal understood the wink all right, but his curiosity was unsatisfied.

'Escort? What for?'

'Oh, blimey, the usual thing. You 'member that feller Werner—went on leave an' never come back?'

The pal nodded.

'Well, it appears 'e took up with a tart in Blighty. 'Is ole uncle 'd left 'im a 'undred pound, and 'e was that silly about the tart, 'e deserted. Course, she

didn't say nothing—not so long as the money larsted, ho, no ! '

' Ho, no ! '

And the two men nodded their heads, as sages well acquainted with the wickedness of womenkind.

' An' then what 'appened ? '

' Well, Werner tried to get work, but 'e couldn't get none, because 'e 'adn't got no ref'rences an' registration card. 'E got desp'rate, and wanted 'em to both put their 'eads in the gas range. Catch 'er doin' that ! '

' Ah,' said the pal, nodding sagely once more. ' Catch 'er or any other bleedin' tart doin' that fer a man what 's risked 'is life fer 'er.'

' 'E got so obstreperous-like, and talked that wild when she wouldn't do it, that she was feared 'e 'd murder 'er. 'E might jes' as well a bloody well done it too, 'cos 'is blinkin' number 's up all right. Well, she got 'im to lie down, and give 'im some beer. While 'e was asleep she gets 'is pay-book and badges and 'ops off to the bloody p'lice. 'E 's under arrest now in Blighty, pore mucker.'

' Pore mucker. Well, so long, old man. See yer when yer get back.'

' Ah. That 'll be Thursday, I reckon. So long, Bill.'

The place where men condemned to death by court martial were shot was an immense flat field with a lonely barn in the middle. Outside the barn, for some reason, lay the skulls of a couple of cows—perhaps a kindly *pour prendre congé* from the Army Council.

The dismal little procession set out in the gloom of fading night—officer, A.P.M., escort and prisoner, firing party. They tramped down the muddy *pavé* road, over the muddier field path to the barn. The words of official condemnation were read in the raw, drizzly dawn as quickly as possible by the young officer, who felt sick at his stomach. The prisoner's eyes were bandaged, and he stood trembling and whimpering against the side of the barn.

The word of command was given.

' Crack ! ' went the rifles, echoed immediately by a second ' crack ! ' which sounded as if two sets of shots had been fired close together.

It was the young officer's duty to advance to the body with his revolver drawn, and make sure life was extinct. He had to use very great efforts not to be sick.

OF UNSOUND MIND

OF UNSOUND MIND

Nobody will be surprised to learn that there was considerable scandal in the small town of Carchester when the wife of a House Master at Carchester School ran off with a young man, especially since the young man had no money. More or less malevolent gossip, masquerading as moral indignation, is one of the world's unfailing amusements; but people who live in large towns can scarcely conceive how swiftly such a piece of news runs through a little place like Carchester. Nor can they conceive the delighted avidity it is received with, and the frightful displays of morality it occasions. Of course, people in little towns are like people everywhere else; but they are compelled to cover up their own tracks, and therefore divert attention to any one honest enough to be found out, with a gigantic hypocrisy which alone gives an adequate idea of infinity. You have to live in such a place to get the foul rich flavour.

Carchester regretted it hadn't a cathedral, which it might have had if the Carchesterians of the sixteenth century hadn't destroyed one of the loveliest abbeys in England in a fury of moral righteousness. In place of a cathedral there was the School, which was extremely County, and only took tradesmen's sons when the fathers had been knighted. Quite a lot of the town made its living from the School; and the School treated the Town with that smooth, indecent

insolence English tradesmen seem to find so gratifying. Imagine the scandal, then, when Evelyn Constable, County in origin and married to one of the School, disappeared with a young penniless artist, named Ronald Cranton. This was in May 1911. Carchester, virtuously wondering what the world was coming to when such terrific events occurred unpunished by the wrath of God, was therefore hardly surprised when it came to August 1914.

Mr. Arthur Constable, who united in impressive respectability the functions of husband, House Master, and Churchwarden, was broken-hearted. At least, so he said. He was a stumpy, super-dignified, little man with a large crumbly moustache and a refined accent. When privileged to behold Mr. Constable, you felt as if the Thirty-nine Articles had been clothed in flesh and moved before you with dignity and refinement. All the boys in Constable's House were noted for their gentlemanly behaviour; many, indeed, carried on the tradition in later life at Magdalen, Capri, and Taormina.

As to the broken heart, there might be differences of opinion. Arthur Constable was at any rate *accablé*, knocked all of a heap. You see, there was the awful possibility that with such a scandal he might have to resign. Such is the salutary power of Public Opinion.

However, a gallant effort was made to avert scandal. The Vicar of St. Mary's, the most refined and dignified church of Carchester, called by appointment on this distinguished and injured member of his flock, to administer spiritual consolation and see if anything

could be done. It was the day following Evelyn's flight, and only a few of the Carchester aristocracy yet knew about it. The Vicar strolled urbanely into the School Close. He was a large, mottle-faced man who had to shave twice a day. Susceptible to the poetry of Nature, he noted appreciatively the rooks cawing in the high elms, the appropriate jackdaws in the chapel tower, and that mellow atmosphere of refinement produced by pseudo-Elizabethan brickwork.

He found Arthur Constable in the study—a large sombre room, smelling of furniture polish, and so crowded with huge wooden objects of furniture that one trembled for the world's future supply of mahogany. The walls were covered with photographs of ' teams,' and of old boys who had taken Holy Orders. Mr. Constable was sitting in a pathetic, rather hopeless-dawn posture, with his chin on his chest, and his arms hanging limply over the sides of his very roomy leather armchair. He half rose to his feet, but the Vicar gently pushed him back, holding his right hand in the clasp of friendship. The Vicar spoke in those soothing throaty tones he adopted towards the poor, aged, and infirm :

' Sit down, sit down, sit down ! My dear old friend ! A calamity indeed—but you must *not* give way.'

Mr. Constable pressed a hand to his eyes, while the Vicar pulled over a chair, and sat down beside him, gently patting his shoulder. The Vicar twice cleared his throat to begin the very neat little exhortation he had prepared, when Constable sat up with a sort of convulsion :

'The awful disgrace of it! I 'm a ruined and broken-hearted man, Throgmorton. Broken-hearted and ruined!'

'Come, come, you must not indulge your grief too much. No disgrace attaches to *you*—I speak as a man of the world, as well as a Churchman. Disgrace there may be, but *that* falls on—others!'

'But think of my position. Such a scandal is bound to damage the School's prestige. I haven't yet summoned courage to write to the trustees, but I feel I must resign.'

'Resign? Nonsense! Of course you must not resign. Why, that would look as if *you* acknowledged some guilt in yourself.'

'But what will the Head Master's attitude be?'

'I saw him this morning. He asks me to assure you of his sympathy, and he wishes to see you. I know he will be distressed, angry even, if you speak of resigning.'

Arthur Constable sighed deeply, and relaxed in his chair. The Vicar went on:

'There must be no foolish talk of resigning. You are sinned against, not sinning. But—is it all irrevocable? She has done a rash, a foolish, a criminal thing, but—there is always mercy. It is one of our Lord's divine attributes. Could you but bring yourself to forgive, and—er—make her come back at once, scandal would be averted, and—er—in fact, all would be well.'

Mr. Constable shook his head mournfully, and produced a crumpled note from his pocket. The Vicar

carefully adjusted his glasses, frowned impressively, and read :

'CARCHESTER SCHOOL,
11th May, 1911.

'DEAR ARTHUR,—This is to tell you that I am leaving you for ever, and going away with Ronald Cranton, whom I love. I should like you to divorce me, but I have no doubt you won't.

'I know you 'll feel bitter towards me, that you 'll find excuses for yourself and plenty of disparagement for me. I also know that I 'm doing the one thing in life which gives me a chance of freedom and happiness. I 've been Ronald's mistress for three months, and even in those snatched hunted moments I was far, far happier than in all my life before. Don't imagine I 'll ever come back to you. Even if Ronald left me, I 'd rather die than do that.

'I might say much more, but I 'm going to my love, my happiness, and happy people haven't room for personal resentment and bitterness. Going away from here is like breaking-up for a glorious life-holiday.

'I 'm sorry if this hurts you, but I did have a rotten life with you. Yet I hope you 'll be happy.—EVELYN.'

The Vicar laid the letter slowly on his knee and removed his glasses. He spoke emphatically :

'Constable ! This is a dreadful, a heartless document. It 's not the work of a sane person. I 'm now convinced that your wife is of unsound mind. I shall tell everybody so.'

However, it is not impossible to take another view of this situation.

Evelyn was a second daughter and a fifth child in one of those extremely mortgaged County families,

whose continued existence is such a mystery to ordinary people who pay cash. Her father had been in the Indian Army, resigned on inheriting an old country house and a mortgaged estate, returned to England, married, and spent the rest of his life begetting children and killing birds, beasts, and fishes.

Evelyn was a lonely child. What little money there was for education 'had' to be spent on the boys; the girls stayed at home with an underpaid, underfed, rather cross governess. The family were too poor to entertain, and therefore had to refuse most invitations. The boys went out fishing and shooting with their father in the mortgaged fields; the girls loyally joined their mother in the painful task of remaining superior on an inferior and sadly dwindling income. But, as the whole family remarked both in and out of her presence, Evelyn was queer.

She liked to read books and to spend hours alone in the orchard, in the crook of a large sympathetic tree hoary with lichen. There she dreamed the mawkish but touching sex-idealisations of adolescence—how the knight came riding down through Hurley Wood, and carried her off on his great black horse, just as such things happened in William Morris and Maurice Hewlett. She could feel the firm clasp of his arm round her waist, the hard cold touch of his plate-armour against her hand and cheek, the warm vibrant trot of the horse. It was all so real that she was surprised when they called her for tea, and she found she 'd never left her tree-trunk. She would then be reproved, ostensibly for loitering and for the green stains on her

frock, in reality for the look in her eyes and the glow in her sensitive face.

Quite as often she was an energetic tomboy, bunking about the place with her brothers in those terribly exciting schemes where everything has to be done at the double.

At nineteen she was very quiet, with a wonderful warmth and grace under the lingering gawkiness and rigidity of adolescence. Music lessons suddenly gave place to music, and she would spend hours at the piano, playing Chopin, and then drifting into improvisations —a sort of accompaniment to the mental film of her day-dreams. Then she would abruptly jump up from the piano and go out, half-stifled with vague yearnings for life. She loved the soft English country, the gentle, rounded trees and hills not much higher than trees, the lush water-meadows with the cows going clumsily down and splashing among the scented rushes in the summer, the sweep of the March wind over the bare uplands where you hear nothing but a tinkle of sheep bells and the hiss of the swift air streaming through the grass blades, the melancholy of October sunsets in the orchard when the misty air was fragrant with burning leaves and the jingle of harness from the hidden lane was oddly loud.

When she came back to the house with a kind of still ecstasy in her, a quiet but deep light in her eyes, the family rather hated her. They didn't like this wandering off by herself, they resented her unconscious aloofness and the ' something '—what was it ?—she brought

back from solitary walks. This was supposed to be very unhealthy, and the proper treatment plenty of boisterousness and ' laughing the child out of it.' So the family made clumsy and (quite unwittingly) rather cruel and brutal jests at her. At such time she usually sat quiet and said nothing, thinking she must be wrong and they right. At other times she would run away—not to her room, for she had to share that with a sister—but to the hayloft or her crooked tree, and brood rebelliously.

If you think of it, there is nothing at all surprising in her marrying Arthur Constable. He wasn't indeed the almost forgotten knight of early dreams, but he was the one eligible man who proposed.

The solitude of these pre-war, impoverished rural families was very great, their ignorance amazing. The solitude and ignorance were faithfully transmitted to the children. From the family's point of view Constable was an excellent, almost an unhoped-for, match for Evelyn. He was related to the County, he had a certain amount of money, he was about to be appointed House Master of a most respectable school, and his opinions coincided with theirs like two equal triangles. So the whole unspoken feeling of the family pushed her at him, and it is hard for a sensitive girl to resist that.

She didn't dislike him. He had a cold but genuine kindness, a tongue-tied devotion which was flattering to a girl who had never been wooed. He desired her violently, and was violently ashamed of it, tried to

conceal it even from himself. He was incapable of any deep tenderness, and had never even considered what is meant by intimate friendship with a woman. But he gave her something. He lent her books, which to him were classical texts, to her vibrating life and passion. He didn't understand her absorbed love of music, but one of the felicities of his ready-made domestic Paradise was to listen to 'soothing' piano strains wafted after dinner by a beautiful but submissive wife. His desire moved while it frightened and slightly repelled her, and yet awoke her curiosity. Almost any ordinarily decent man would have done as much and have stood as good a chance.

They were married, and at first she tried to pretend she was happy. They had no children. She rather shrank from intimate relations with her husband, and he, according to the stupidity of his kind, thought this was right and pure. Probably he gratified an unconscious sadism by vanquishing her coldness, by imposing himself on her against her deep instincts. Her woman's life with him was almost null. She was submissive, and tried to do her duty as the wife of a House Master; not so successfully but that there were shakings of heads and pityings of 'poor Mr. Constable' for having married so young and 'impossible' a wife.

At first she found the tea-parties and dinners and similar functions at Carchester amusing; then they bored her, especially when she found her impulsive efforts at friendship repelled at a certain point by a gentle coldness. Yet it was fun to have all Arthur's

books to her hand, and to buy new dresses instead of perpetually re-making old ones. Quite often they went to London, and Evelyn delighted in the theatres and picture galleries.

But within six months most of this wore off, and she gradually became profoundly unhappy, she didn't quite know why. She found the routine life imposed upon her more and more irksome. And, to her surprise, she found she was developing a tendency to bicker with Arthur over trifles which really didn't matter to her. The trifles, of course, were merely symbols of a hidden antagonism, though she didn't realise it. She was always doing little things which he disliked. Her sudden little impulses annoyed him, her rapid sparkles of gaiety and enthusiasm somehow made him angry. He tried to keep her in order, rather as if she had been a room full of schoolboys, and she resented his condescension. Then she would get very repentant, and think how wicked she was, and try to be a good wife. Unfortunately she shrank more and more from the consequences of being a good wife, and sometimes felt almost sick with apprehension and repulsion when at bedtime he kissed her repeatedly on the mouth instead of giving her the ordinary official good-night.

Eighteen months after marriage she was listless and unhappy, always ' taking up ' more or less futile occupations in an effort to conquer *ennui*. All these efforts at ' doing something ' only filled the void of her life with an empty buzzing. She tried to get sympathy from her mother, and was gently snubbed. Her one

consolation was a really good cry once a month, after which she usually felt better for a day or two.

Evelyn was twenty-six, and had been married nearly four years when she met Cranton. It was at one of her weekly term-time tea-parties, which had been rather fun at first and afterwards such a bore, with always much the same people, much the same pastries and sandwiches, and much the same talk.

In the opening door she saw the head of a young man with a straight nose, warm-looking mouth, and tumbly dark hair. He was looking back over his shoulder, and smiling down at the tubby, eccentric little Maths. master. Evelyn felt as if something rather superb and dangerous, but infinitely charming and amusing, had come into the gathering—like a herald of the Gods into a chorus of Theban dotards. He was plainly on his best behaviour, but said several things which made Evelyn laugh and shocked the rest of the party. She found she was listening to him only, and was sorry when he went. She liked the firm clasp of his hand when he said good-bye, and the friendly way he looked directly into her eyes. She wondered why she blushed slightly.

'Who is Mr. Cranton?' she asked her husband, when every one had gone.

He frowned.

'A temporary drawing-master, recommended to the Head by a friend in London. I can't imagine why he was accepted.'

'Why not? I think he's very charming and amusing.'

'Oh, I daresay he thinks he's a lady-killer and all that. But I don't know what we're to think of his character and morals. Peterson says he has positively indecent drawings and photographs on his walls, and that his own paintings are deplorable, deplorable. Sort of Impressionistic stuff, you know, but worse. Why people pay any attention to such nonsense . . .'

Evelyn had ceased to listen. She was thinking of a laughing head, half-turned back, in the doorway.

That night she dreamed she was bathing in a very blue, sun-sparkling sea. Cranton walked down to the edge, clothed in some sort of tunic, holding a silver spear in his hand. Suddenly she found herself beside him, giving him a beautifully curled shell she had been treasuring.

Of course, they fell in love.

The effect on Evelyn was quite magical. She became immediately beautiful, and everybody remarked how well she looked. A little drawn tightness about her mouth vanished into sweetness, and a lovely mysterious life came into her eyes along with an intense crystalline blue. Her whole body seemed to come alive, and the last trace of youthful awkwardness disappeared in the unconscious poise and grace of maturity. Her body and she were at one. Sometimes she was very gay and animated, sometimes silent for hours in an absorbed reverie. She seemed to be brooding over a hidden delight.

Meeting was very difficult for them ; moreover, she was utterly inexperienced in such matters, and had to struggle against inherited prejudices and her own timidity.

Women in love are marvellous, and develop amazing abilities and qualities. Here was the rather timid, very much suppressed, unhappy wife of a Public School master, encompassed by all sorts of difficulties and inhibitions. Directly her whole body and instinct clamoured at her that she was really in love for the first time, that Ronald was her man, she became lucid, alert, and resourceful. She deceived the husband who was not her man with a calmness which would have been effrontery if it had not been superb. With admirable logic she saw only one thing—Ronald was her man, and nothing else mattered. She never even bothered about the future, but lived only for the next time they could be alone together.

The Easter term came to an end, and with it Cranton's engagement. In the hurry and bustle of breaking-up they managed to meet. But instead of gliding to the meeting on the wings of happiness, Evelyn walked with heavy steps which seemed interminable. The golden light had left the world, as if some one had suddenly jerked a switch, and the little town seemed intolerably drab, muddy, and noisy. She had suddenly realised completely that it might all be over, that Cranton might go, that she might fall back into the dread world of feeble occupations and Arthur.

Ronald held out his arms to her as she came into his

room. As he kissed her, he noticed she was trembling slightly, and that her lips were hot and dry. He looked closely at her, and saw the agony in her eyes.

'What has happened? What's wrong? What is it?'

She turned her head aside, and he saw tears running uncontrollably from her eyes. In his arms she was inert, instead of light and alive.

'My darling, my beautiful, tell me what has happened! I can't bear your unhappiness. What is it?'

She made an effort:

'I was only thinking that this is——'

Her voice choked. He took her head in his hands, and looked into her wet eyes. He spoke slowly:

'Did you really think that? Did you really think I could lose you, you, *you*, sunlight, flower-petals, ecstasy?'

The speech of love is stereotyped; all lovers say the same things in the same words, and to all they are divinely original and glittering with the promise of happiness, which is beauty. Evelyn felt he was very lovely.

'I hadn't thought of it before.'

'Why not?'

'Too happy, I suppose. And then I trusted you.'

'And now you don't trust me? Darling, you knew I only came here for a short time. I 've got to go, but I 'm not going alone, unless . . .'

She said nothing.

'You 'll come?'

She still was silent.

'I 'm poor, and what the good pious people here

would call a vagabond. I 'm more or less an outcast and a wanderer. . . .'

She kissed him.

' Don't be silly, dear. You know you 're wonderful. But if you hadn't wanted me, I think I should have killed myself.'

Six weeks later Evelyn was gone. Mr. Constable did not divorce her. In subsequent years whenever the subject was raised, he either said that he loved her too much to consent to so final a separation, and that even now he would have compassion on her if she returned from a life of sin, or he hinted at the tenderness of a High Church conscience. The fact was, his conceit would not allow him to stand up in a Court of Law and admit that a woman had thrown him over unhesitatingly and cheerfully. He couldn't bear the thought of Evelyn's letter being read out in public.

Of course, her family threw her over. She received maternal and paternal letters, containing familiar phrases about disgrace, ought to be ashamed, going off like a barmaid, wantonness and madness, no longer a child of ours, victim of a penniless scoundrel, never darken these doors again, and the like comforts.

The letters upset her for a couple of days ; then she tore them up, and never thought any more about them.

After all, they were perfectly happy together, and their friends were not the sort of people who ask for your marriage lines and pedigree before they 'll shake hands. Evelyn loved her new life. It was all such

fun, such an adventure. It was all most thrilling, and went on being thrilling, because they were together. At first they lived in a couple of small rooms in London, and then Ronald had a great stroke of luck. His work improved so much under the stimulus of his passion for Evelyn and the happiness of being with her, that a London art-dealer agreed to give him a retaining fee of two hundred pounds a year, and to pay him whatever his work earned above that sum. As soon as the agreement was signed and the first quarter paid, they packed their bags and made for Paris.

Evelyn had never before been out of England. They went the cheapest way, night boat, third-class, Newhaven to Dieppe, and arrived in Paris very early in a clear warm September morning. Ronald was amused and pleased by her excitement and delight in everything.

'It 's such *fun*, such an *adventure*,' she kept saying, as they swayed along the empty morning streets in a *fiacre*. 'Oh, Ronald, do look at that man's peg-top trousers—what 's this big street we 're in ?'

'Avenue de l'Opéra.'

'What fun !'

They took a studio in Paris, and Ronald worked hard, avoiding the infinite temptations to idleness of the siren city. He sent off a lot of work to London, and then in the Spring they went to Florence. Evelyn didn't mind going third-class with spitting Italian peasants, having to walk everywhere, and go without lunch to take an excursion or pay for a gallery—Cranton was too poor to obtain a recommendation for a free pass from the British Ambassador. But poverty has its compen-

sations. When you 're too poor to buy entertainment, you must rely on the things that cost nothing—the beauty of the world and the spectacle of human life.

In Mr. Constable's study there hung a large Medici print of Botticelli's ' Spring,' which had been presented to him by some one. It was the only thing in Florence which Evelyn disliked.

' But, my *darling*,' Ronald protested, ' it 's beautiful. It 's almost the best thing of his in existence.'

Evelyn twitched her nose, as she always did when she hated something.

' No, I don't like it. It 's so, so—damned respectable ! '

Ronald was so staggered by this extraordinary judgment that he was dumb. He didn't realise it was an indirect tribute to himself.

Four pounds a week wasn't much for two people, even in pre-war days ; but Evelyn never worried and never complained. She had the sublime good-humour and courage of a nice woman who is really happy. She made her old frocks over again, quite forgetting that this had been the misery of her youth. She didn't get tired of being happy ; in fact, she could hardly get used to it. Really, it was amazing never to be reproved or improved, not to be questioned about what she was doing and why, not to be condescended to.

Once she lost her purse, with nearly eight pounds of their scanty money in it. She confessed the loss, almost trembling, with tears in her eyes. Ronald looked a littled startled for a moment, and then said :

'Well, darling, you didn't mean to. It 's only some beastly old money. We 'll just have to be extra careful this quarter.'

Evelyn remembered that she had once left a book of Arthur's in the garden, and it had been ruined by the rain. He had lectured her domineeringly for half an hour on carelessness, economy, and respect for other people's property. Ronald was amazed that she threw herself down beside his chair, with her head on his thigh, and burst into tears.

'But, Evelyn, dear little one, it 's nothing, it 's nothing. The silly old money isn't worth one tear.'

'Oh, it 's not that, it 's not *that*! You don't know. . . .'

They went on being happy for over three years. They went to Spain and Germany, Italy twice, several times to Paris, and then back to England. Evelyn's one fear was that she might have hindered Ronald's career. But by 1914 he had achieved enough success to make that fear groundless. They now travelled second-class, and Evelyn did not have to re-make old frocks.

Then came the deluge. It had seemed to them that they had foreseen everything, that no human power could destroy their happiness, since they were happy so long as they were together. They had forgotten the great collective hatreds and stupidities and crimes of the world. The Gods had been very patient with the world for several decades, they had not pressed for payment. But at last they imperiously presented the formidable bill. Evelyn and Ronald were among the

many who paid the debt for which they were not responsible ; for such is the Justice of gods and men.

For a time they tried to ignore the war and to go on living as usual, hoping it would soon be over. They were sneered at and persecuted, the annual subsidy was withdrawn, and they became very poor again. Ronald worried constantly over this, but to Evelyn the one awful dread was that he might be taken from her and never come back. She felt cold and sick and anguished whenever she thought of it.

Naturally, the inevitable happened ; and he had to go. She pretended to be very cheerful when he went off in deep depression to be trained, kissed him, and said what fun it would be when he came back, which of course would be very soon. She had only the twelve shillings and sixpence a week of the Tommy's ' female dependent ' to live on, and she made up her mind to try to get work, so that she could send him parcels. She got some rather underpaid work on the clerical staff of a company which made hospital bandages. But her life was empty and dreary and miserable. She cried so much that she wondered childishly where all the tears came from. Her only happiness was in Ronald's letters. They wrote to each other every day, long, passionate, rather incoherent letters, which might have been summarised : ' I love you, I am miserable without you, if only we could be together again.'

Their meeting when Ronald had his firing leave was tremblingly ecstatic, but very sad. Ronald was red-faced and depressed and tired, utterly and hopelessly

miserable in the Army. Evelyn was thinner and pale. The wonderful glow had died down in her body, and the crystalline blue of her eyes was dimmed. On the last night of his leave he held her close to him, staring desperately into the darkened room, and felt her warm tears falling irregularly on his naked shoulder. After that agony, parting next day was almost a relief.

In May 1916, just five years after they had set out so gaily together on their happy adventure, Ronald was sent to France. He was not allowed to see Evelyn again, and she did not get the letter saying he was going until he was already at the Base Camp. Evelyn had felt that she could not be more lonely and miserable than in the months when he was training, but there was a sharper anguish, a more intolerable loneliness when he had vanished into that mysterious Expeditionary Force, so near in miles, so immeasurably far in contact. At the thought of death, mutilation, hardship to the lovely body she had held and kissed so often, she suffered intolerable agony. She did not sleep at all the night after she got his letter telling her he was in the trenches. All night she walked up and down her narrow, dingy, little bedroom, or threw herself on the bed in paroxysms of grief.

In a short time she became so ill with sleeplessness and misery that she was told she must leave her work —efficiency was needed in war-time. She went without food, light, everything, to send pathetically humble parcels to Ronald.

They still wrote to each other every day. Some-

times one, two, three interminable days would pass without a letter, and she would live in terror lest something dreadful had happened to him. Then two or three letters would arrive by one post. The battalion had moved, or something had happened which might delay letters. Ronald wrote with difficulty, knowing that every letter was censored.

May went by, June passed with a sky of lead in a world of interminable sorrowing. On the 2nd of July she saw on the placards that a big battle had started. She spent a penny less on her meagre lunch to buy a newspaper. Yes, it was the great offensive. Sir Douglas Haig said : ' So far the day goes well for England and France.'

When she got back there was a letter from Ronald dated 29th June. He wrote very tenderly, but added a postscript : ' I may not be able to write regularly in the next few days. You 'll know why when you get this letter. But, above all, don't worry if letters are delayed.'

Her heart seemed to be beating in her ears, and her legs trembled as she eagerly read the letter, standing in her hat and coat. So he was in the battle ! O God, he was in the battle !

No letter on the 3rd, no letter on the 4th, no letter on the 5th when she drew her weekly money from the post-office. She scarcely ate or slept, waiting for the postman, starting up when she heard the sharp rat-tat at the street door, and running down to the box. Each day the grubby little servant said perkily :

' Nothin' f' you t'-day, miss.'

On the 12th she still had received no letter. She went again, pale, trembling, and unhappy, to draw her money. The post-office clerk looked at her ' ring-paper,' and then at her. He fumbled over some documents.

' Private Cranton was killed in action on the 1st of July, miss. We 're advised that . . .'

She did not wait, but turned and ran from the post-office, leaving the clerk gazing after her in astonishment, and calling : ' Here, miss, miss, come back. . . . !'

She walked for hours through the noise and dust of the London streets in the stifling July air, not knowing where she was going. Her face was dull white, her eyes lifeless. She did not cry, but from time to time mechanically wiped the perspiration from her forehead with her fingers. Her whole body ached and trembled with fatigue and grief.

Late that night, the policeman on duty at Waterloo Bridge saw a woman climb laboriously on to the parapet. He was too late to stop her ; the water had already closed over her when he reached the place and peered over. He blew his whistle shrilly, and the patrol boat began its grim search.

The coroner's verdict was ' Suicide,' with the humane rider, ' while of unsound mind.'

Mr. Arthur Constable had to be present at the inquest, and went into half-mourning for three months.

KILLED IN ACTION

KILLED IN ACTION

At fifteen Jack Hann, one of an indigent East End family of eight, threw up his job as a newspaper boy and ran away to sea. In 1911, after enduring for seven years all the atrocious brutalities and abominations which form the lot of 'ship's boy,' he deserted and joined the Army. Everything about him from the tilt of his cap to the hearts, anchors, and girls' names tattooed on his arms, showed the sailor; his over-assured manner betrayed the deserter. He would not have been accepted but for his magnificent physique, the readiness of his answers, which showed intelligence —and the Agadir scare. But he was willing to sign on for twenty-one years, and, as every one knows, the worst scamps make the best soldiers. The *blasé* doctor looked at his naked body with something like admiration:

'With a chest like yours you ought to be in the Guards. But what 's that?'

The doctor pointed to the middle of Hann's body which was disfigured by a half-effaced, obscene tattoo mark.

''Appened when I was a boy, sir. Three sailors got me drunk, and done it when I was asleep, sir.'

'Umph. Not very pretty. Didn't it hurt?'

'Swelled up somethink dreadful, sir.'

'Umph. You a drunkard?'

'Ow no, sir!'

'All right. Passed.'

Another recruit, who had exactly reached the regulation age of eighteen, passed in to the same regiment on the same day. Eric Crane was indeed the child of the Army, son of a soldier who had married a housemaid on the strength, and who took his discharge after twenty-one years' service, with the rank of Regimental Sergeant-Major. Young Crane's whole horizon was bounded by the Army, the height of his ambition was to become R.S.M., and his most valued possession was his father's long regimental cane. From childhood he had heard nothing but regimental gossip; the names of officers (with remarks on their qualities, but chiefly on their defects), interminable tales of colonial campaigns, the glory of a soldier's life, and the contemptible inferiority of all civvies. At ten he knew every rank, branch, and badge of the Army; at fifteen he could drill like a trained soldier, and imitate to perfection the roar of his father's regimental voice on the parade ground. He was plainly destined to be a peace-time drill-instructor, and to end his days with a belly and a hoarse voice in a country pub.

From the beginning there was rivalry between Hann and Crane. They were easily the best men in their batch of recruits, and obvious candidates for promotion. Crane had the advantage of knowing his drill, of being the son of an old soldier, while his superiors were pleased by his fanatical devotion to the Army. On the other hand, Hann was alert and respectful, always turned out with a sailorman's neatness,

and was far more intelligent. The rivalry—for the first stripe—soon developed into hatred. The careerism of the mercenary Army, its narrowness, its comparative idleness, its encouragement of unscrupulous emulation, its bullying, its monotony, its enforced respect for rank, create deeper feelings of rivalry, hatred, and bitterness than would be justified in contenders for an empire.

A slight lapse from discipline on Crane's part, artfully and apparently innocently revealed by Hann, lost Crane his first chance of promotion. Hann was promoted lance-corporal first, and gained six months' seniority. He rubbed in his triumph by all the petty and infuriating methods of bullying and annoyance which authority, even the authority of a very junior N.C.O., can exploit. The hatred between the two men became irrevocable, and Crane waited to ' get his own back ' with the carefully concealed rage and vindictiveness of a narrow life and a narrow nature.

In August 1914 they were both in the first Expeditionary Force. Hann was now a corporal, Crane a lance-corporal, in the same company. In the somewhat tumultuous and disorderly retreat from Mons, Hann was wounded, and evacuated to a Base Hospital. With the mercenary soldier's eye to the main chance, Crane took very good care of himself when no superior was present, but ostentatiously exhorted his men, feigned to expose himself, and seemed to be fighting like a tiger, whenever an officer was about. One of these edifying scenes was witnessed by his Colonel and a

General. The Colonel, anxious to show how well his men were behaving, pointed Crane out to the General. Crane saw the officers out of the corner of his eye :

' Come on, you fellows, stick it ! Let 'em 'ave it ! Rapid—fire. Think you 're at Bisley. Show 'em what the British Army can do ! '

And he popped off a magnificent rapid fire at nothing.

Great is the power of eye-wash.

' A fellow worth promoting,' said the General. ' We shall need men like that. But the Commander-in-Chief is worried about the situation, MacKenzie. The French are letting us down badly. They 're only five miles nearer the enemy than we are, and still retreating.'

The officers disappeared from sight. Crane looked round cautiously.

' Come on, boys, let 's 'op it. The swells 'as gone.'

When Corporal Hann returned to the battalion in April 1915, he found that more than half the men were Kitchener recruits. His professional disgust at this was great, but it was nothing compared with his disgust, amazement, and fury when he found himself reduced to his substantive rank of lance-corporal, and put into a platoon commanded by Second-Lieutenant Crane. Second-Lieutenant Crane ! Hann felt as if some one had hit him violently in the pit of the stomach. ' Blimey,' he kept saying to himself, ' blimey, that little squit ! Strike me muckin' pink ! ' With the complete impudence which comes so naturally to men who have adopted the unnatural life of obedient hired

assassins, he tried to bluff his way through the situation. Meeting Crane in a quiet part of a ruined village street during their first period of rest, he saluted correctly, and then held out his hand :

' 'Ullo, Crane ! Congrats, ole man. Quite the gent nah, ain't yer ? 'Ope y' ain't too prahd t' speak to a' ole pal.'

Crane, in a fury, stuck his arms akimbo, pushed out his fat jaw, and stared into Hann's eyes with implacable and threatening hatred. For a moment his rage prevented him from speaking, and the effort he made not to hit the other man left his face flushed a dark red.

' Now, look 'ere, Lance-Corp'ral 'Ann, you 've bin in the Army long enough to know 'ow a junior N.C.O. should speak to a' orfficer. I 'old 'Is Majesty's commission, f' services rendered in the field, an' it 's your duty t' respec' an' hobey me as y' superior orfficer. See ? Becos you an' me was in the ranks together, and you played a bloody dirty trick on me, blast yer, ain't no reason why you should give me none of yer blasted lip now. See ? If y' come any 'f yer tricks with me, I 'll crime yer fer it, and that ain't no jokin' matter out 'ere. See ? You bin too long scrimshankin' it in Blighty.'

' Ow, Crane, nah, I say. . . .'

' Stand to attention when an orfficer speaks to yer ! '

Two sergeants were strolling towards them—evidence. Hann stood rigidly to attention.

' An' don't answer back, or it 'll be the worse fer you. See ? '

'Yessir.'

'Alright, don't let it 'appen agen. Ser'ant James! 'Ere, Ser'ant James!'

'Sir?'

'This man 's in my platoon, ain't 'e?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, you keep a heye on 'im. 'E 's got dangerous hideas. Above 'is station. 'E wants a bit 'f discipline. You keep 'im 'ard at work, ser'ant. I know 'im, 'e 's a dangerous character.'

'Very good, sir.'

The sergeant saluted, and received a condescending acknowledgment as Crane walked off.

From that moment the war between the two men was open, and occupied their attention almost more than the greater war in which they were engaged. Hann's endeavour was to get away to another part of the Army, where his evident excellence as a soldier would be recognised and rewarded by promotion. His object in life was to become Crane's senior again. He knew his King's Regulations, like every old soldier; but so did Crane. And Crane had the immense advantage of his commissioned rank. Hann applied for a transfer to another battalion; Crane got it washed out, on the grounds that it was a mere slacker's excuse to get a few days out of the line. Hann then volunteered for the Flying Corps; Crane parried this by representing to the Company Commander that they had far too few Regular N.C.O.'s, and that they couldn't afford to lose one. A few weeks

later rankers were invited to volunteer for commissions. Hann put his name down at once. The Company Commander casually mentioned to Crane that he was recommending Hann's name to the Colonel for a commission. Crane went red with rage.

'You can't do that!'

'Why not? Hann 's a first-rate N.C.O. and a bright fellow. He 'd make an excellent war subaltern.'

'I know all about that, but you can't recommend 'im. 'E ain't got a' education certif'cate, and 'e 's one of the worst boozers I ever saw. If it 'adn't bin fer me protectin' 'im, 'e 'd 'a bin run a dozen times afore now fer drunk and disorderly, an' on active service too.'

'But there 's no conviction against him.'

'You wait a few days, an' see if there ain't.'

Second-Lieutenant Crane was well acquainted with the ways of old soldiers. The next afternoon he took a nearly full jar of rum, and carried it down the trench to Hann's dug-out. He beckoned the lance-corporal out, and took him round a traverse. He spoke with a rough air of confidence :

'Corp'ral 'Ann, this rum ain't bein' issued right. The men ain't getting their proper share. I issue a quarter 'f a jar, an' next day the muckin' thing 's empty. Them ser'ants is moppin' it up. Can't carry the muckin' thing about with me all day long. Now, you 're an old soldier. You jus' look after this jar fer me until stand-down to-night, will yer?'

'Very good, sir.'

Second-Lieutenant Crane was not mistaken in his view of old soldiers' ways. By six o'clock that night Hann was hopelessly drunk—in a front-line trench. He was 'crimed,' lost his stripe, and was condemned to three weeks' Field Punishment Number 1. Crane bore evidence against him before the Court Martial with a hypocritical air of sorrow for an old comrade in trouble. The Court gently reproved him for entrusting rum to a junior N.C.O., but he explained that Hann was an old comrade whom he believed to be dead sober, and whom he would have trusted like his own brother. . . .

Field Punishment Number 1 in the line meant going on all the worst fatigues, and, among other disabilities, falling to the bottom of the leave list, and being tied to the side of the trench for several hours each day. While Hann was undergoing this punishment, Crane contrived to pass down the trench two or three times daily. If he was alone he would stop, and say sneeringly :

'Well, y' ain't much nearer a commission yet, are yer ?'

If he was with an N.C.O. or a man, he would say with an affectation of moral compunction :

'Now let that be a warnin' to yer to keep off the drink. There 's a man 'oo might 'a bin a captin be now, and look at 'im !'

Hann endured all this with a silent white fury, but he dared not say or do anything, knowing that in his position any sign of revolt might lead to his being shot.

But, as the soldier's saying is, he had 'a mark' on Crane, and only waited his opportunity.

When the Field Punishment was over, Private Hann was diligent in his duty, and the Sergeant-Major more than once suggested that his stripe should be given back to him. But Captain Crane—he was commanding the company now—always shook his head.

'No, Ser'ant-Major, no. 'E 's a trained soldier, I know, an' good at 'is job. But 'e can't meet the responsibility 'f command. 'E ain't worth a stripe. 'E 's a drunkard, Ser'ant-Major, you know 'e is. . . . 'Ave another drop 'f whisky, Ser'ant-Major.'

During the Great War the lives of most soldiers on the Western Front was hell. The life of ex-Corporal, now Private, Hann was a super-hell. On ration parties he always somehow got the heaviest load, and, unfortunately, a load—like a couple of sealed rum-jars—from which it was impossible to steal anything. He never missed a working party. If there was a fairly cushy sentry post, he did not get it. When Captain Crane was arranging a patrol in No Man's Land, he would invariably say to the subaltern or N.C.O. in charge :

'Take 'Ann along with you, 'e 's a good man, 'ad lots of experience.'

But Hann also knew how to conceal his rage and wait to get his own back. He had picked up a loaded German revolver in a trench near Festubert. He fired one shot to test it, then carefully cleaned it and kept it hidden under his tunic, strapped against his side.

The war became more and more hellish. From Festubert their Division moved south, and on the 1st of July 1916 they found themselves in the beginning of a great attack, now known as the Battle of the Somme. For days the preliminary bombardment had gone on, giving the enemy plenty of warning, and failing to destroy the wire. The casualties that morning were terrific. At ten o'clock Hann found himself in a nook of a German trench, stunned, dazed, but unwounded, the sole survivor of his platoon, probably of his company.

He looked about him with a haggard stare. The artillery was crashing and thundering more violently than ever. From his right and left came the hysterical rattle of machine guns, punctured by the loud thudding pops of bombs. The trench he was lying in was smashed nearly level with the ground. He was surrounded by things in khaki and field-grey stained with dark red ; most of them were oddly contorted and still, some of them moaned and shrieked in a language equally incoherent whether English or German ; one of them, lying on his back with a bullet through his brain, was feverishly and monotonously pawing with his right leg, and digging up the chalky soil. Mad, of course.

Hann dumped his rifle and equipment, took his German revolver in his hand, and began to crawl back towards the line of trenches they had left at dawn. The German wire, with its dreadful sharpened long spikes, tore his clothes and flesh ; he scarcely noticed the pain. He had only one thought—get out of it, get

out of the barrage, get back to safety. Shells screamed through the air and roared down beside him like express trains crashing through an enclosed station ; the black stifling explosions covered him with earth and chalk. He crawled from shell-hole to shell-hole, throwing himself with quaking, cowering terror into each hole, as the pitiless German shells pounded and crashed around him.

Suddenly, on the brink of a large shell-hole, he found himself staring at a human face. A man in British uniform. An officer. Captain Crane, the other survivor of the company. Cowering in a shell-hole.

The two men stared into each other's eyes. A dreadful grin distorted Hann's face. He held the other man, whose nerve had completely gone in the battle, with the concentrated hatred of his glare. Hann slowly pulled his right hand forward, with the German revolver clenched in his fist.

' Take that, you muckin' barstard, you 'ore's by-blow ! '

Crane's white trembling face abruptly disappeared in a powder-blackened bloody mess, smashed into a disgusting chaos of torn flesh, as the quivering body rolled convulsively over.

A few weeks later, the Casualty List in the daily paper was being read aloud by a sergeant to a number of listening soldiers, among whom was Lance-Sergeant Hann. He was reading the list of officers Killed in Action :

'Crane, Eric. 2nd Lieut. (A/Capt.), 2nd Blankshires.'

The sergeant paused :

'Crane ? That was your bloke, wasn't it, 'Ann ? '

Lance-Sergeant Hann took his fag out of his mouth, and spat.

'Ah,' he said, 'an' a muckin' good riddance, the bleedin', bloody, muckin' barstard.'

A BUNDLE OF LETTERS

A BUNDLE OF LETTERS

I

From Mrs. Frederic Bracegirdle to Colonel Richard Crosby, D.S.O., G.S.O. 1, Nth Division, B.E.F., France.

The Cottage, Clopton on the Hill,
Glos., *July 15th*, 1917.

Dear Dick,—It is years since I have heard anything of you, and I have only just discovered your address—through Jim Montague who is now at the W.O. I am writing to you because I am in deep distress, and you are the only person I know who can help me. Don't put this letter down without reading it through. Remember that Fred always looked upon you as his dearest and closest friend, 'his brother in arms.' I know he would have done for *you* what I now beg and pray you to do for *me*, his widow.

By this time, I feel sure you will have suspected that this is an appeal for money. It is nothing of the kind. It is about Walter, our only child. You know I was left rather poorly off when Fred died, which is why I live here in this little remote village, but we—Walter and I—have managed to get along. Walter has had as good an education as I could afford him, and he is really a most talented and gifted boy. Of course, I see him through a mother's eyes, but there are many others who believe in him and his future as a musician.

Fred always wanted the boy to follow his own profession, and go to Sandhurst, but I am sure I was right to allow the boy to follow his own bent. He is very sensitive and rather delicate, perhaps a little wayward and self-willed, but we must overlook these things in the young, mustn't we ? At any rate, as Walter grew up, he and I had long heart-to-heart talks, and he always *besought* me not to send him to Sandhurst. His early childhood was clouded by his father's coming home from South Africa with enteric, and then the awful years when Fred was a complete invalid, ending up with his death in 1905. Perhaps it was that which first turned him so completely against the Army as a career, though personally I think his *genius* for music would always have unfitted him for a rough and tumble life.

Of course, he joined up bravely for this war as soon as he was able, and won his commission in England. But they have sent him out to France and *into the Front Line* ! Think of it—he is only *twenty* ! I am sending you his last letter to me (which please return) to show you how miserable and unhappy he is. What is the use of sending boys into action, when they are totally unfitted ? O my God, when I think of him out there suffering, and that any day I may have a telegram to say he is mutilated or dead, I feel I shall go mad. I can scarcely sleep or eat in my agony. Dick, you *must* do something, you must get him out of that hell. He is all I have in the world. Isn't it enough that I lost my husband for England, that they must take my only boy, too ? He isn't the soldier type, Dick. If you

could see him, you 'd realise it at once. Won't you please, please help me, for poor Fred's sake ? Suppose his nerve should give way, and he disgraced his father's memory ? He *won't*, I know. He 's brave, but every moment is agony to him, when stronger men are happy in the strife of battle for their Country. Dick, can't you get him a job on your staff, or something to do where he won't be constantly in danger and misery ? Please, please !

Forgive this long and rambling letter. I 'm quite distraught. Forgive me, and do try to help me.— Yours very sincerely, (Signed) MABEL BRACEGIRDLE.

II

(*Copy of letter enclosed with above.*)

From 2nd Lieutenant WALTER BRACEGIRDLE, 9th Battalion The Royal Colshire Regt., B.E.F., to his mother.

9TH R. COLSHIRE REGT.,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 2/7/17.

DARLINGEST,—I 'm scribbling this from billets in the place behind the Line where we ' rest ' after our twelve days in the Line. To-morrow we go back again ! How I shall stand it I simply don't know, I dread the very thought of it, and my Company goes straight in the Front Line.

I really have tried, dearest, and so far I 've kept all the worst of it from you, but if it goes on much longer I feel sure I shall go mad or something. Do you think

that any of Father's old friends could use their influence and get me some less awful job ? I feel I 'd do anything to get away from this ghastly infantry routine. So far, in the two months I 've been out, we 've been in a ' quiet ' part of the Line. What it must be in an ' active ' sector I simply daren't imagine. What with the shelling and the sleeplessness and the going on patrol and all the rest of it, I 'm quite worn out.

This does sound complainy, doesn't it ? But you know how I always hated the idea of fighting and war. And then the people I have to live with are really appalling. The only decent one is the Adjutant, who was music master at a Public School before the war. Of course, his taste is dreadfully dull and old-fashioned, but he seems like an emissary of sweetness and light out here ! He told the Colonel about me in the hope of getting me on to Headquarters, but the only result so far is that I scarcely have a minute to myself on ' rest '—I 'm always having to go and play the most miserable songs and dances for them on a piano excruciatingly out of tune !

Dearest, I think of you so much, and of all the lovely quiet days at Clopton, when we used to go out on our walks and get bunches of wild flowers, and then come back for tea, and I 'd play to you for hours and hours. Do you remember ? I sometimes wonder if I used to bore you with so much playing—you were an angelic listener ! And then when I think that but for this war I should have had a couple of years at Prague with you now—it 's too discouraging. I 've *completely* lost my

touch already, and I sometimes wonder if I 'll ever get it back.

I send you a little spray of forget-me-nots I found in a deserted garden here. Do you remember those we used to get in the brook near the Vicarage ? There are scarcely any flowers here, except poppies and weeds.

To-night I feel dreadfully depressed—especially since I 've got to go and thump out horrors on that beastly old wreck of a piano after dinner. I hope I haven't depressed you too much. But I 've got it into my head that I 'll never see you again, and that 's unendurable.—Good-bye, darling, with heaps of love and kisses, (Signed) From WALTER.

III

Copy of letter from Colonel CROSBY to Mrs. BRACEGIRDLE.

(*Private.*)

G.S.O.1, NTH DIVISION,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 19/7/17.

DEAR MABEL,—I have received your letter of the 15/7/17, and return herewith Walter's letter of the 2/7/17.

I am very sorry that you should be in such distress about Walter, but after all his lot is no worse than that of thousands upon thousands of young men who have cheerfully taken up arms for their Country in its dire peril. What you ask me to do is highly irregular, and I fear you do not realise all that you are asking. But

partly for Fred's sake, partly for your own, and partly because I really think Walter is not the type of man we want in the trenches, I am going to do what I can.

The situation is complicated by the fact that Walter's unit is not within my command. His Division forms part of another Corps, which in turn forms part of another Army. However, I know his Corps Commander slightly, and I will write to him and ask if Walter can be transferred to some less onerous position.

I am writing to your boy to tell him what I am doing, and hope this will cheer him up a bit.—With kind regard, yours sincerely, (Signed) RICHARD CROSBY.

IV

Copy of letter from Colonel CROSBY to Lieutenant-General Sir HARTLY COMBE-ROGERS, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., etc., etc.

(*Private and Confidential.*)

G.S.O. 1, NTH DIVISION,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 19/7/17.

DEAR SIR HARTLY,—I am writing you on a subject which I fear is somewhat irregular. It concerns a young fellow who is a subaltern in the 9th Battalion of the Colshires, who are under your command. He is a son, the only child, of poor Fred Bracegirdle, who was at Sandhurst with me. I feel sure you remember him. He won his D.S.O. most gallantly at Magersfontein, was invalided home with enteric, and died of the effects in 1905.

Bracegirdle always intended that his son should follow his own honourable career, but apparently after his death the boy was sadly spoiled and petted by the widow. At all events, he has turned out to be a musician or something of the sort, and from all accounts is quite incapable of leading men in the Field. His mother is (rightly, in my opinion) apprehensive that the boy may conduct himself in such a manner as to bring disgrace upon his father's memory. This I feel would be most deplorable, and I, as an old comrade in arms of Bracegirdle's, should feel it very deeply. In fact, the poor kid, who is only twenty, seems already on the verge of a breakdown. Could you not give orders for him to be transferred from his Battalion to some post where he could still be useful and yet kept out of mischief and the possibility of disgracing himself by scrimshanking in some manner ? If you could do this, I should feel it a personal obligation to you, and I know the mother would be overjoyed.—Yours sincerely,

(Signed) RICHARD CROSBY, Col., G.S.O. 1.

V

Copy of letter from Colonel CROSBY to 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE.

(*Private.*)

G.S.O. 1, NTH DIVISION,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 19/7/17.

DEAR BRACEGIRDLE,—Your mother wrote to me recently, and I learn that you are not comfortable in your

present unit, and that you think even that you may not be able to fittingly carry out your duties. I need not tell you that every officer who holds His Majesty's commission is expected to do his duty to the full extent of his capacity wherever he may be sent. You must do your best.

But your father was a very dear friend of mine, and for his sake I am willing to try to do something for you although the proceeding is highly irregular. You are nowhere within my command, but I have written to your Corps Commander and have asked him to get you some sort of billet where you 'll be more comfortable. Of course, I can't promise anything, but General Combe-Rogers is an old friend of mine, and I 've no doubt he 'll do what he can.

I must impress upon you the necessity for complete discretion and silence in this matter. It would be highly inconvenient to us both if anything should transpire.—Yours very truly,

(Signed) RICHARD CROSBY, Col., G.S.O. 1.

VI

From 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE to Colonel CROSBY.

9TH ROYAL COLSHIRES,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 21/7/17.

DEAR COLONEL CROSBY,—I scarcely know how to thank you for your letter. It puts new life and hope into me. I got it to-day. We are now in Support after a perfectly terrible four days in the Front Line,

where we were shelled and machine-gunned and sniped badly, and lost several men. I really thought I should go mad.

What sort of a job are you getting me ? I am most anxious to know. Please don't think I am trying to dodge work. I 'll be glad to do anything, anything, if only I can get away from here. I feel sure my father would not have wanted me to be here. You see, he only knew me when I was a small child, and he had only one idea about life in his head—the Regular Army. I 'm not a born soldier, I 'm a born artist ; and there you are !

I can't express my gratitude to you. Since I 've been in the Army hardly any one has showed me the least kindness or understanding, which makes your action all the more overwhelming. How soon do you think I shall get away ? And do, please, tell me what you think I shall be sent to.

With my warmest thanks and heartfelt gratitude. —Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) WALTER BRACEGIRDLE.

VII

From Mrs. BRACEGIRDLE to Colonel CROSBY.

THE COTTAGE, CLOPTON ON THE HILL,
GLOS., *July 22nd*, 1917.

MY DEAR DICK,—Your letter has just reached me. I have only a few minutes before the post leaves, but I must write to thank you with all my heart and soul for what you so generously are doing for my boy. I know

Walter himself will thank you, but nothing we can do is any real acknowledgment of your magnificent kindness.

I can't go on, I can't see through the tears, but they 're tears of joy. I 'll write again. But thank you, and God bless you. If Fred looks down on you, be sure he blesses you too.—In deepest gratitude, yours very sincerely, (Signed) MABEL BRACEGIRDLE.

VIII

Copy of letter from Colonel CROSBY to 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE.

(*Private.*)

G.S.O.1, NTH DIVISION,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 23/7/17.

DEAR WALTER,—As your father's oldest friend, I feel I have a right to call you ' Walter.' I was touched by your letter, and realise that you are suffering in your present position. But we must not be too impatient. Things happen slowly in the Army, and a Corps Commander has many great and important things to deal with. It may be some time before we get a reply. However, if I don't hear from General Combe-Rogers soon, I 'll write him again.

I can't tell you what sort of a job he 'll propose. I thought it best to leave that to him. He may put you somewhere on the lines of communication, or give you a job as Town Major, or as a junior instructor on a Corps or Divisional School, or even—but this is un-

likely—some Staff appointment. The whole thing depends on the Corps Commander.

Cheer up ! I 'm doing my best.—Yours very truly,
(Signed) RICHARD CROSBY, Col., G.S.O. 1.

IX

From 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE to Colonel CROSBY.

9TH ROYAL COLSHIRES,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 25/7/17.

DEAR COLONEL CROSBY,—I opened your letter with great eagerness, hoping it was to tell me that I had been transferred. Of course, it was a little disappointing to find that nothing has yet happened, but the kindness of your letter more than made up for this temporary disappointment. But I do hope I shall hear definitely soon. Every hour is a torment until I get away.

I don't know that there is anything I could teach at a Corps School—I 'm not a good soldier. I think I should prefer the Town Major's job, where one is more or less on one's own, and the duties are administrative. Do you think you could suggest that to the General. Would it be proper for me to write to him now, or should I wait ?

With all my thanks and gratitude, but please do hurry !—Yours very sincerely, (Signed) WALTER.

(A long letter from Mrs. Bracegirdle to Colonel Crosby is omitted.)

X

Copy of letter from Colonel CROSBY to 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE.

(*Private.*)

G.S.O.1, NTH DIVISION,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 27/7/17.

DEAR WALTER,—It would be extremely foolish and improper for you to write to the General, either now or at any other time. Did I not tell you that the whole proceeding is *irregular*? If the General knew that I am communicating with you, we should both be severely reprimanded, and you might lose your commission.

Try to control your impatience. I can't work miracles. If I don't hear from the General by the end of the month, I 'll write him again. I begin to regret that I ever wrote to you. You are so impatient, and take so much for granted !—Yours,

(Signed) RICHARD CROSBY, Col., G.S.O. 1.

(The copy of a letter from Colonel Crosby to Mrs. Bracegirdle is here omitted.)

XI

From 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE to Colonel CROSBY.

9TH ROYAL COLSHIRES,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 29/7/17.

DEAR COLONEL CROSBY,—I am very sorry if I seem impatient and 'take so much for granted.' I assure

you I am deeply grateful for your aid, but every minute to me here is hell. After all, it is a little thing to ask, thousands of officers are moved about, and you must have great influence. This waiting is absolute torture.

We are in Reserve now, and go out for three days' rest to-morrow. Please, please send the transfer before we go back in the Line again.—Yours sincerely,

(Signed) WALTER.

XII

Copy of letter from Colonel CROSBY to Lieutenant-General COMBE-ROGERS.

(*Private and Confidential.*)

G.S.O.1, NTH DIVISION,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 31/7/17.

DEAR SIR HARTLY,—We have just received the first news of the offensive this morning, and I venture to congratulate you on the splendid successes of your Corps in this action. I trust that the W.O. and the Country generally will recognise your great and important services.

Among such great and heroic deeds, while so much responsibility lies on you, it seems trivial and inopportune to remind you that I wrote you on the 19th inst. to beg your aid in the very deserving case of a young officer under your command—2nd Lieutenant Bracegirdle, 9th R. Colshires. Can you tell me if anything has been done in the matter ?—Yours sincerely,

(Signed) RICHARD CROSBY, Col., G.S.O.1.

XIII

From 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE to Colonel CROSBY.

9TH ROYAL COLSHIRES,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 31/7/17.

DEAR COLONEL CROSBY,—There is no word from you, and I am in despair. This morning there has been the most terrific barrage to the north, indescribably awful, and we hear that we are 'out' for six days' practice, and then have to do a show! For God's sake, let me hear from you. Can it be that you have done nothing? O God, this is awful. Do, do send that transfer.—Yours sincerely,

(Signed) WALTER.

(A letter from Mrs. Bracegirdle to Colonel Crosby, and the copy of his reply to her, are omitted.)

XIV

From Lieutenant-General Sir HARTLY COMBE-ROGERS to Colonel CROSBY.

(*Private and Confidential.*)

MTH CORPS H.Q.,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 1/8/17.

DEAR CROSBY,—Thanks for your note of congratulation. I think we gave the enemy a jolt yesterday, although everything did not pan out quite as well as

we hoped, and the casualties are rather high. But I have no doubt whatever that Victory is within our grasp.

I have not forgotten your former letter, and I have made inquiries into the case of young Bracegirdle. His Colonel reports that he is a nervous but quite adequate officer, as New Army standards go, and is unwilling to release him. I must say I fully concur. The boy has been with his platoon for over two months, and his battalion is scheduled for a show shortly. To remove him now would be a weakening of efficiency. Moreover, I am dead against any sort of favouritism in the case of these new officers. They must take their chance, and jobs out of the Line must go to officers with long service, or to those who have been wounded. I regret to have to disappoint you in this, but in matters of discipline we must be adamant. —Yours truly,

(Signed) HARTLY COMBE-ROGERS,
Lieutenant-General Commanding Mth Corps.

XV

From 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE to Colonel CROSBY.

9TH ROYAL COLSHIRES,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 2/8/17.

DEAR COLONEL CROSBY,—Still no word from you! The whole situation has become cruelly ambiguous. I begin to feel that you didn't mean anything, that you

only wrote to keep Mother quiet, and did not intend to do anything. If so, it was the cruellest thing you could possibly have done, to raise hopes you did not mean to satisfy.—Yours,

(Signed) WALTER BRACEGIRDLE.

XVI

Copy of letter from Colonel CROSBY to 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE.

(*Private.*)

G.S.O. 1, NTH DIVISION,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 2/8/17.

MY DEAR WALTER,—At last I have heard from your Corps Commander. To my great surprise and disappointment, he refuses to entertain my request for your transfer. I am deeply sorry about this, and I blame myself for having allowed you to think that the transfer was a certainty. Although I knew that the matter ultimately rested with the General, I did not for a moment think he would refuse a request of this nature—although irregular—when it came from me. But he *has* refused, and there is nothing for it but to carry on as best you can. I 've shot my bolt, and there 's nothing more I can do.—With all good wishes, yours sincerely,

(Signed) RICHARD CROSBY, Col., G.S.O. 1.

XVII

Copy of letter from Colonel CROSBY to Mrs. BRACEGIRDLE.

G.S.O.1, NTH DIVISION,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 2/8/17.

DEAR MABEL,—I am terribly sorry, but the Corps Commander has refused my request to transfer Walter from his present unit to some less arduous post. I did my best, and I have failed. What troubles me is that Walter jumped to the conclusion that I had complete powers, and that the matter was settled, whereas I was only an intermediary in a difficult and indeed most irregular negotiation. His last letter seemed to show a considerable state of excitement, and a most unjustifiable resentment against *me*! Please write to him, and tell him he must endure his lot, as so many thousands of better men have done.—Yours sincerely,

(Signed) RICHARD CROSBY.

XVIII

Copy of letter from Colonel CROSBY to 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE.

(*Private.*)

G.S.O.1, NTH DIVISION,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 4/8/17.

DEAR BRACEGIRDLE,—Your letter of the 2nd is both impertinent and ungrateful. I did my best for you,

and because my efforts failed, you attribute the most absurd motives to me. I am ashamed that my friend's son should behave in this way. Pull yourself together, and be a man.—Yours faithfully,

(Signed) RICHARD CROSBY, Col., G.S.O. 1.

XIX

From 2nd Lieutenant BRACEGIRDLE to Colonel CROSBY.

9TH ROYAL COLSHIRES,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 4/8/17.

DEAR COLONEL CROSBY,—I have just received your crocodile letter of the 2nd. I don't believe you for a moment. I think you just tried to sneak out of things by pretending to do something. You thought by delay you could keep Mother satisfied until I got killed. You could have got me free if you 'd wanted, but you didn't want. However, I don't mean that you shall get away with this piece of perfidy and meanness, and I intend to forward all your letters to the Army Council, who will see me righted.—Yours faithfully,

(Signed) WALTER BRACEGIRDLE.

XX

Copy of letter from Colonel CROSBY to General LORD BLOGG, the Army Council.

(*Private and Confidential.*)

G.S.O. 1, NTH DIVISION,
B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 6/8/17.

DEAR GENERAL BLOGG,—As an officer who served under you at the Curragh and in South Africa, I venture to appeal to you in a matter which concerns my honour and my whole career. Acting on motives which were perhaps weak but not dishonourable, I endeavoured to procure a transfer for the son of an old comrade in arms. The Corps Commander concerned refused my request (very properly I think), but this cub has now turned nasty, and threatens to send my letters to the Army Council! I am sending you the correspondence in confidence, and you will see from it the whole course of the affair. May I beg you, as my former Colonel, to see that this matter is not allowed to proceed further? If this can be done, you will add one more to your many favours, and earn my unending gratitude.—Yours sincerely,

(Signed) RICHARD CROSBY, Col., G.S.O. 1.

XXI

From General Lord Blogg to Colonel Crosby.

(*Private and Confidential.*)

War Office,
Whitehall, 10/8/17.

Dear Crosby,—Don't worry. I 've looked through the correspondence, and quite understand. You always were a dog with the women, what ? If the cub sends your letters here, I 'll see they 're intercepted and pigeon-holed. I return your bundle of letters.—Yours, (Signed) Blogg.

Note.—On 24th November 1917, 2nd Lieutenant Walter Bracegirdle was tried by Court Martial for inflicting a wound on his left foot with a service revolver, on the night before his Battalion went into action. He was sentenced to degradation from his rank, and immediately conscripted as a private. Two months later he was wounded by a German bomb in the left arm, and suffered the amputation of three fingers. He remained on light duty until the end of the war, and was demobilised in September 1919.

BOOBY TRAP

BOOBY TRAP

As Leonard Crowley walked briskly down Piccadilly towards his club he felt extremely cheerful, and wondered why on earth any one should feel a grouch against life. This Panglossian optimism was not wholly due to his new suit, which fitted him admirably, or to the pleasant warmth of a June morning, but to the general felicity of his existence.

His meditations were interrupted by the touch of a hand on his shoulder, and a voice :

'Hullo, Crowley! Where are you off to so merrily?'

Crowley halted abruptly and stared at the man, a lean, almost haggard-looking fellow, in a shabby captain's uniform, leaning on a stick. The blue hospital band was on his left arm.

'Hul-lo, Hastings! By Jove, you 've altered! Didn't recognise you at first.'

'I think the last time we met was when you were walking down to the dressing-station at Ypres in '16.'

'So it was. I *am* glad to see you again. Come and have a drink at my club.'

Crowley had to walk slowly not to outdistance Hastings's crippled limp.

'Well, and what are you doing now?' asked Hastings, stretching out his wounded leg with both hands as he sat down.

'Oh,' said Crowley importantly, 'I 've got a very good job in the City with Sir William Chandler. The big financier, you know. I 've just got engaged to his daughter.'

Not a bad result for a man who had joined the Army as a junior bank clerk, a tribute to his dexterity in grasping opportunities!

'By Jove, old man, you 're lucky. Congratulations on both events.'

'And what are you doing?'

'Trying to find a job. I 'm still on sick leave, but after two months' search the only offer I 've had is a temporary clerkship in Whitehall—three pounds ten a week.'

Crowley hastily changed the conversation. With a shade of patronage he offered Hastings a Number 4 Abdulla cigarette. With a slight shock of surprise Crowley noticed that Hastings's hands shook very slightly but continuously as he held the match. And how old and worn he looked! Seemed thirty-five or more, and couldn't be older than twenty-four. Poor devil.

'Tell me what happened to the battalion after I left, and how you got wounded.'

'I was lucky, too damned lucky. If I hadn't lasted out so well, I shouldn't be the wreck I am now. If a man didn't get a blighty good and early, it was a damn sight better to snuff it altogether.'

'Oh, don't say that. I . . .'

'My dear fellow, what does it matter? When the whole European apple-cart 's upset, what does it matter

whether one among the infinite pippins is squashed or bruised? I 'm done for, but so are hundreds of thousands of better men. I suppose my wound pension will just keep me going until " Lights Out." And I can never marry.'

' Why on earth not? '

' I 'm permanently in the state Wycherley's Mr. Horner pretended to be in.'

' Wycherley's Mr. Horner? '

' Oh, I forgot you aren't interested in literature. To put it bluntly—my wounds have made me a eunuch for life.'

' Good God! I 'm frightfully . . .'

' Oh, it doesn't matter. But you were asking about the battalion. Let me see, now. From Ypres we went down to the Somme—a very sticky do. We had a lot of casualties. Raymond was killed there. You remember Raymond, our Company Commander? '

' Raymond? Tall, dark chap, with a slight lisp? '

' No, that was Hoxton. " C " Company. He was killed at Arras. Raymond was light-haired, a great fellow, one of my best friends. But never mind. . . . After the Somme we had a fairly easy time for some months, except that the winter was so bitterly cold—we nearly froze. Then we got into Arras—the Colonel was killed there.'

' Ashley? '

' No, he was the Colonel in England. Another chap. From Arras we went north, and arrived in time for the 31st of July. Passchendaele was awful, quite the worst thing in the war, so far as I know. In March '18 we

were in the Second Army, and so missed the worst of that; and then in the Fourth Army when the Boche attacked at Kemmel. We were lucky that year. But I must say I was tired—well over two years of it, you know.'

'Yes, yes. I . . .'

'You know the war changed very much at the end. Were you there, by the way?'

'No, I . . . I was Adjutant to a Training Battalion.'

'Well between '16 and '18 there was much more gas, artillery, and tanks. But when the Boche was driven from the Hindenburg Line it changed into open warfare, where most of us were pretty much at sea at first.'

'And you weren't hit all that time?'

'I won't say I wasn't hit, but never enough to matter. You know, a bullet through one's sleeve, a smack on the tin hat, shell splinter in the pack—always nearly a blighty, but never quite. A little gas, a certain amount of shell concussion. But nothing that mattered.'

'But you were hit eventually?'

'Yes, in the last week of the war.'

'What rotten luck! How did it happen?'

'Through a booby trap.'

'What?'

'Oh, I forgot you won't know about them; the Boche left a good many in 1917, though, when they retired from the Somme. But in '18, after the Germans were defeated, they still contrived to leave quantities of booby traps. You 'd pick up an innocent-looking tin hat or a regimental badge, and Bang! off would go a mine, and the picker-up would go to kingdom-come.

Jolly nasty. Made some fellows quite nervous. The worst were those you couldn't see. Most ingenious. They 'd choose some large house or public building, which was bound to be used as headquarters or something, and bury a large charge of dynamite in the walls or foundations. It would be attached to a detonator, and the striker to fire the detonator would be held up on a wire. The wire went through a tin of some corrosive acid, which gradually ate away the wire. Sooner or later the wire broke, down came the striker, fired the detonator, and up went the building. Most ingenious.'

'And is that what happened to you?'

'Yes, but I wasn't in the building. I should have been but for my infernal curiosity, and all my little troubles would be over.

'What happened was this. Just a week before the Armistice we captured a village called Réancourt, not far from the Belgian frontier. We had orders to rest there for a couple of days. I was then on Battalion Headquarters, Assistant Adjutant. The Colonel insisted on taking over the Boche Kommandatur as Headquarters. The R.E.'s came and searched the place, and said it was safe.

'After we 'd been there about a couple of hours, I began to feel restless for some reason. I told the Colonel I thought I 'd go and have a look round the billets. There were still a number of French people in the place, who looked at us curiously and very timidly. I suppose they were so used to being bullied by occupying troops that they suspected us; or maybe

they 'd got used to the Germans. Anyhow, as I can talk a little French, I thought it was up to me to do some liaison work ; so I strolled along and said a few words to every one I met—you know, explained we were allies and friends, and that they were liberated and so on. Outside one cottage were a couple of women and a man. It was almost at the end of the village, and if the man hadn't aroused my curiosity, I 'd have gone straight back, and arrived in plenty of time for the show.

' The Frenchman with the two women was a magnificent man physically, one of those tall, robust, deep-voiced, black-bearded Frenchmen who scarcely exist now—all killed. I was amazed to see such a fellow in the village, where the only other males were children and very old men. And I was also amazed at the extraordinary waxen paleness of his face and hands. They had exactly that sickly pallor of potato shoots which have sprouted in a cellar. I went up and spoke. The women looked dreadfully scared, and glanced from me to the man. In answer to my ' Bonjour,' the man said, in French, of course :

' " Monsieur is an English officer ? "

' " Yes, monsieur, I 'm a Captain in the English Army—your allies, you know."

' He turned to the women :

' " You see ! I was right ! Monsieur is English, an ally, a friend. Did I not always tell you that with the English we should have them, those Boches ? "

' To my embarrassment the women seized my hands

and tried to kiss them. I gently held them off, and said to the man :

' " But who are you ? "

' " Mon Capitaine, I am a corporal in the 125th Regiment of the line."

' " A corporal in the 125th Regiment of the line ! But what on earth are you doing here ? "

' " Mon Capitaine, I have been here since August, 1914."

' I was more amazed than ever, and could only exclaim :

' " Since August, 1914 ! But how . . . ? "

' " I shall explain, mon Capitaine. After the retirement from Charleroi I was separated from my regiment, and marched with six of my comrades. Outside this village towards sunset one evening we had a slight skirmish with a vedette of Uhlans. We killed two of them, and the others made off ; but I was wounded in the leg. I could no longer march. I exhorted my comrades. My comrades, I said, we are the 125th Regiment of the line ! France needs us. So long as two of us remain together there exists the 125th Regiment, and the senior commands. I order you to carry me to that cottage there, and to leave me. You, Duval, Georges, are senior soldier. You will take command of the 125th Regiment, you will continue to retire, and will report for service to the first officer you meet. . . ."

' He was so charmed with his eloquence, like many Frenchmen, that he would have gone on dramatising events for a long time, if I hadn't interrupted :

' " Yes, yes, corporal, but how do you come to be

here now? How is it the Germans didn't get you?"

'"I shall explain, mon Capitaine. These excellent *patriotes*"—and he laid a hand on a shoulder of each of the women—"took me in, dressed my wound, and gave me a bed. Three days later they heard that the Germans were coming to occupy the village. They dreaded I should be massacred, and hid me in the cellar. There I have lived for over four years, eating the food these ladies obtained, going out only on the darkest nights for a little air. This is the first day I have seen the sun since August, 1914."

'They asked me into the house, and the man took me down and showed me where he had been hiding. In the cellar. It was in two compartments. He had a little bed in the inner compartment, and the entrance was most ingeniously concealed. No one would have suspected that the cellar was double. I was amazed at the man's determination, and at the women's devotion. I asked him why he had remained there for so long. He replied proudly:

'"Mon Capitaine, you know it is a soldier's duty not to surrender so long as he has a chance of escape. I remained here so that I might rejoin my regiment as soon as the village was liberated. To-morrow, if you will assist me, mon Capitaine, I shall report to my commanding officer, and join in the pursuit of the enemy. It has been a long time, a very long time. No matter. At last they are defeated, and France will be free!"

'We went upstairs, and the women insisted on giving

me a cup of coffee—made from roasted acorns, I fear. We chatted over various things, and I tried to reassure the women, who were still timid and distrustful. Presently the corporal asked me where I was billeted. I told him our Headquarters were at the Kommandatur. He jumped to his feet, and clasped his hands :

' " Listen to me, mon Capitaine ! Listen and act ! Last night, before you attacked at dawn, we knew the Germans were getting ready to leave. All was in confusion. ' To-morrow,' the Germans said to our peasants, ' your friends the English will be here. We 've left a little present for them.' My friends informed me, and I esteemed it my duty to go upon patrol and gather information. I crept along behind hedges, and listened. I heard the German infantry collect and march off to the positions from which you dislodged them. All was in darkness, but from the cellar entrance behind the Kommandatur came a gleam of light. I crawled up, and saw three German engineers at work. They were burying something in the floor. They spoke and laughed, but I could not understand them. One however used the word ' Englander,' threw his arms in the air, and puffed from his mouth, as one who imitates an explosion. They have buried explosive ! I am convinced of it. Run, mon Capitaine, hurry, you must warn our comrades ! "

' You may be certain I didn't linger. With one " Pardon, mesdames ! " I jumped from the table and hared down the village street, with my tin hat in my hand, and my gas-bag bumping on my chest. I was

about twenty yards from the Kommandatur when there was an enormous explosion. The whole house seemed to rise into the air, and half the road with it. Something smacked me in the face, something else gave me a terrific blow on the thigh and groin, and the next thing I remember was waking up in a hospital train.'

Crowley drew a deep breath, and leaned back in his chair.

'Good God! And was every one in the house killed?'

'Every one, I was told afterwards. Colonel, second-in-command, adjutant, signal officer, runners, signallers, officers' servants, and the regimental sergeant-major. A regular holocaust.'

'You were lucky!'

'Do you think so? I sometimes wonder.'

'And what happened to the French corporal?'

'God knows. I never heard. But I sometimes ask myself whether those *patriotes* were wholly moved by motives of pure patriotism. The corporal was a powerful and very handsome fellow . . .'

SACRIFICE POST

SACRIFICE POST

I

QUITE frankly, Lieutenant Davison didn't like his position. In the first place, it was tactless of the Command to label it brutally 'a sacrifice post.' However willing you might be to do your bit and to take your chance with the rest, flesh and blood revolted from so chill and formal a holocaust. A sacrifice post! They plonked you out there in the mud, you and a couple of N.C.O.'s, and some men—and your job was to get killed if the enemy attacked. You weren't allowed to retreat; you knew that nobody would be allowed to succour or reinforce you; the idea was that you held out as long as possible with a couple of Lewis guns, and then fired a coloured light to give warning to the artillery when capture and death were inevitable. A very pleasant prospect. A most jolly look-out.

Davison was leaning against the parapet of his strong-point, studying the lie of the land in front of him. It was just after dawn on his first day in command of the Post. There were lots of ragged wire in front, then a long shell-torn slope, then . . .

Zip-phut!

A sniper's bullet hit the sandbag parapet just about two inches under his chin. Davison ducked into the trench, feeling a bit sweaty in the back. If that Boche hadn't been quite so keen on a six o'clock aim . . . !

He went along the trench towards his pill-box dug-out. The liquid chalky mud washed round his ankles. Rather a delusion, gum-boots—you got all the cold through them, and the condensed perspiration made your socks wringing wet in a few hours. . . .

Crash. Crash-crash. Crash.

That same old battery of Boche whizz-bangs. They 'd been at it ever since midnight when Davison took over. Damn the fellows. Didn't they ever take any rest? No wonder the other officer had been in such a hurry to hand over!

'There 's a map of the dispositions and written instructions—you can't make any mistake.' He had gabbled rapidly. 'Here 's the list of trench stores. You don't need to check 'em, they 're all right—S.A.A., Mills, rifle-grenades, Verey pistols and cartridges, S.O.S., they 're all there. Well, I 'll be getting off.'

'But,' Davison had interrupted angrily, 'you can't buzz off like that! I want to see the sentry-posts and Lewis-gun positions, and . . .'

'Oh, the sergeant knows all about those. . . .'

Four whizz-bangs had crashed about their heads, and the other man had cowered in a manner Davison thought disgraceful in an officer. He was about to remonstrate more angrily, but the other man simply made a bolt for it, shouting over his shoulder:

'He shells and minnies all day and all night. Got this blasted post taped. Hope you enjoy yourself. Cheero!'

Davison had started after him, but the man had vanished in the darkness, hareing down the communi-

cation trench with his runner as if he had received a sudden call to paradise. Davison cursed him, and had spent most of the night going cautiously round his positions, learning the sentry-posts and Lewis-gun emplacements, then returning to his dug-out to study his orders, make reports, and answer queries sent up over the buzzer. The Boche had crumped unmercifully all night. Minnies, pineapples, and whizz-bangs. Luckily, there had only been one casualty—a sentry slightly wounded in the shoulder, and damned glad to get away for a few weeks. But the continued crumping had got the men rattled. Besides, they resented—quite rightly—the fact that the officer in command was relieved more frequently than they were. They couldn't know that the responsibility of such a post meant that the subaltern got hardly any sleep at all.

About three-thirty, Davison had crawled into his wire bedstead to get an hour's sleep before stand-to. Within ten minutes he had been awakened by his servant.

'Wha 's matter? Are they coming over? Anybody hit?'

'No, sir. Runner from Batt. H.Q., sir.'

Davison had torn open the message with feverish haste. It was marked urgent, and required him instantly to furnish statistics of the number of socks in his detachment. . . .

A sergeant was changing the sentries as Davison came down the trench. He heard the perfunctory mutter of the usual words of instruction, and wondered

vaguely what the men made of it all. How patient they were, my God, how patient !

Overhead in the lovely June sky a lark was singing, singing, beautifully trilling. . . .

Crash-crash. Crash. Crash.

The black smoke drifted away, leaving a foul acrid stench of high explosive. Again he heard the clear shrill lark-singing, and did not know whether to bless or curse the silly bird.

His runner shouted :

' Look out, sir ! Here comes a minnie ! '

Rrrr-umph ! A devastating crash, a black spouting of debris, a whistle of falling fragments.

' Here comes another, sir ! '

They watched the awkwardly rotating ' rum-jar ' rise to its height, seem to hesitate, and then wobble towards them. They ran. You always did run from a minnie, even when it was just as safe to stand still.

Rrrr-umph !

Holy Mike, that was a near one ! And, oh unprintable profanities, there was another coming !

Rrrr-umph !

Davison's head sang with the concussion. He rubbed his face hard with both hands, and wished he were dead.

Rrrr-umph !

The Boche sent over twenty-five—five neat batches of five. Davison cursed himself for lingering on his way down the trench. If he had been in the converted pill-box dug-out, there would have been no need for

him to come out; but since he was in the trench, he couldn't very well bolt and leave the sentries to it.

The minnies ceased, and he made a rush for the dug-out. Like the crack of bronze whips a flight of machine-gun bullets snapped round his head. He ducked. O Lord! So there was a machine-gun enfilade into the bargain! What a war, what a job! And nearly three more days of it! . . .

Davison was relieved a little sooner than he had expected, but certainly no sooner than he desired. The relief was due at midnight on the Friday evening. Three days of warm June weather had dried the trenches, but the perpetual harassing fire had kept him on the alert day and night. Three men had been wounded and one killed. Two had reported sick, but the M.O. had refused to allow them to go back—their temperatures were not high enough. But he warned Davison to keep an eye on them. A mysterious epidemic of 'influenza' had decimated the Germans, and was now breaking out in many British Divisions. If the men seemed really ill, Davison was to let them lie in their dug-out until the M.O. could have another look at them. . . .

About three o'clock on Friday afternoon, Davison was writing a report in his dug-out when he heard the usual blundering and scuffling of some one in equipment, blinded by darkness after bright sunshine, feeling his way down unfamiliar steps. An officer's legs, and then the remainder of the officer.

'Hullo, Frazer! What are you doing here?'

'Come to relieve you,' said Frazer, pulling off his tin hat, and wiping some of the sweat from his face. 'My God, it 's hot in Vincent Alley.'

'Relieve me! But what about the men?'

'They 're coming up at the usual time, but the Colonel said I was to relieve you at once, and you are to report immediately to the Orderly Room. Headquarters dug-out is in Bow Lane now.'

Davison looked scared, and his yellow drawn face, with the deep black shadows under the eyes, went paler.

'To the Orderly Room! What the devil have I done wrong, *now*?

Frazer drank off a mug of chlorinated water, and gave a satisfied gasp.

'Ah! That 's better. I was hellish dry.'

'Yes, but what am I to report about?'

'God knows. You 'd better look nippy and hand over. The Adjutant 's waiting for you.'

The sweat was soon pouring down Davison's face as he hurried along the interminable windings of Vincent Alley, heavy with heat and sickening smells of ill-buried corpses and half-dissipated gas-shells. His more heavily laden servant had to trot to keep pace with him. What on earth had he done wrong? Hitched out of the line eight hours before time! A bloody insult. But there, he reflected, you have the Army. They shove you up to be 'sacrificed,' you 're strafed day and night, you flog the flesh from your bones to carry out

orders, and they hike you out to strafe you because you 've forgotten the number of socks in your detachment. . . .

At Battalion Headquarters the Adjutant was playing bridge with the M.O., signal officer, and second-in-command.

Davison saluted.

' Hullo, Davison ! You look hot. Have a cup of tea ? '

' Thanks very much, sir. Frazer said . . .'

' Don't get the wind up.' The Adjutant raked over some papers. ' There 's a Corps order that every battalion must have one additional subaltern trained in signalling, to take over in case of accidents.'

The signal officer made a face.

' The Colonel said I was to send you. You haven't had any leave since Christmas, have you ? '

' No, sir.'

' Here 's your instructions. Take your servant, and go down to Johnson—you know where the horse-lines are. He 'll find you a billet to-night, and transport to-morrow morning. You have to report to the Corps Signalling School before to-morrow evening.'

' Very good, sir.'

' Right you are. Cheero.'

' Cheero, sir.'

' And don't you come back here with more work for me ! ' shouted the M.O., as Davison started up the dug-out steps. He craned back and looked at them, catching a vivid glimpse of their faces shining cheerily at him in the soft candle-light, the cards lying

scattered on the spread newspaper, the half-empty mugs of tea.

'Not bloody likely!'

II

When they got to the top of the hill, Davison sent on ahead the Maltese cart with his servant and valise. It was not far to rail-head, and he had plenty of time. He wanted the luxury of a few minutes to himself.

Behind the bare plain, which for years had been a battle-ground, rose a long wooded ridge, torn back from the Germans in 1914 by French troops whose graves were littered everywhere. Davison stood on a shoulder of the ridge, and looked back. In that clear summer light he could see at least fifteen miles of the British line—No Man's Land with its dark fringes of wire wound and writhed over the countryside like an immense horrible snake. He could see the intricate white pattern of trenches, the ruined villages lying like smashed toys, the dark main roads straight as ruled lines, black slag-hills; far in the distance were the German balloons and a very faint curl of smoke from a mine they worked. Away to the right an airplane was crossing the line, immensely high up, surrounded by tiny little cauliflowers of shrapnel. He could see the flash of big guns, followed long after by a solemn deep boom! and then a little black smoke-spout shot up behind the German lines. How queer! This side of the snake was England and France, the other side Ger-

many. That seemingly empty plain was huddled full of men. That peaceful sky hung arched over a desperate death-struggle of the nations. The lovely sun was clotting the blood on men just killed, parching the throats of the wounded, maddening the fever in the blood of men attacked by this new disease, bringing sweat and curses from men staggering along stifling chalk trenches, drawing out dreadful stenches . . .

He saw shells or mortars exploding on a small low hill about five miles away. Yes, yes it was! That was the Sacrifice Post, and they were crumping it as usual. What was Frazer doing? How incredible that he had been there less than twenty hours ago! He looked at his clean uniform, neat parade breeches, and light fawn puttees, his polished boots, and thought of the scarecrow he must have been only yesterday. And still those little black volcanoes leaped up round the Post; and the whole battered landscape, the whole war, the sounds, sights and smells, the agonies and weariness of it became a dream, a foul hallucination, completely unreal. . . .

Boom! and another big shell hurtled towards 'Germany.'

He turned abruptly and walked on. What a change! Woods to the left, in clear lush leafage. Fields to the right, soft with tall green wheat. Overhead the sun and the larks. Deep patches of shade on the white road from poplars and elms. Cornflowers and poppies in the wheat, a lacey moving pattern of meadow-sweet beside a wet ditch. Which was the reality, which the dream? They couldn't both be true, they couldn't

both exist in the same world. The same sun could not foster that beauty and that hell. . . .

From behind came a faint boom.

But suppose they did both exist? You couldn't say one was 'Nature' and one was 'Man.' The life of Nature was perpetual war, and it was the unique glory of man that his life was creative, was something more than destruction and mutual preying. Men had planted those trees, tended those stately woods, tilled the fields, and built the little village huddled round its brooding mother church which he could see ahead. . . . Everything had got into a muddle. He, Bill Davison, an ordinary British subject, was in a devil of a muddle. Life was striving, yes, but they were striving all wrongly. The real war of the world was not between the Bill Davisons and the Jean Duvals and the Hans Müllers, but between the kind of men who wanted to create and the kind of men who could only assert themselves by destruction. What Bill Davison and Jean Duval and Hans Müller ought to do was to stop blowing each other to hell, and have the matter out with the bastards who had turned the wheatfields into cemeteries. . . .

Davison blinked, straightened his shoulders, and wiped the sweat from his face. He told himself he was going a bit barmy.

III

At rail-head there was quite a little Derby Day of Maltese and mess carts, bringing down officers from the various Brigades. The R.T.O., a wind-infested

spirit, had posted a corporal to shoo the carts away as soon as they had dropped their passengers—he was afraid of attracting the attention of bombing-planes. This excess of caution, which seemed positively lunatic to troops coming straight from the front line, added to the gaiety of the subalterns going on Courses. It wasn't as good as going home on leave, but the next best thing—three weeks out of the bally line. Three weeks! A respite which from that end looked like eternity.

Davison found himself inside an ex-third-class carriage with nine other officers, all from different units, including artillery. Some of them were old men like himself, veterans of twenty-two to twenty-five, with anything from ten to thirty months' service in the line. Others were quite fresh—twenty and under. They all wore divisional colours on their sleeves, and were rather boisterous with excitement. Hardly any of them had met before, but that made no difference. They had all received a gift of three weeks of life, and in the presence of such an event formal introductions were overlooked.

A machine-gun officer opposite greeted him genially :

'Hullo, old bean, where do you come from?'

'Sacrifice Post in front of M——.'

Several others looked sharply at him. Said an artillery officer :

'That's a dirty job. We've got an O.P. near there. Christ, he puts over some stuff. You're well away.'

'We lost two officers, and God knows how many

men there when we were in that sector,' said an infantryman.

'What d' you expect?' said the gunner angrily. 'It 's an old Boche strong-point turned arse uppards. He knows we 're there, and he knows every inch of the ground. It 's toffee for him.'

'Then why keep it on?'

'God knows. Ask Haig.'

The machine-gunner snorted:

'Ask Haig! Ask my backside. Why, man alive, d' you suppose he knows it 's there or bothers about a little thing like that? It isn't his job to worry about such trifles as battalions, let alone individual lives. Why, he thinks in Army Corps, and the smallest unit he worries about is a Division. I thought you knew that. When he loses half a dozen or so he just telephones to Blighty for some more. It 's a first-rate war for those who like it.'

Somebody sang:

> 'Oh, it 's nice to get up in the morning,
> But it 's nicer to lie in bed.'

'Is there any one here had the sense to bring a drop whisky?' asked a Scotch lieutenant.

'Here you are, Jock,' said the gunner, handing over his flask. The Scot frugally emptied it down a thirsty Aberdonian throat, and returned the flask regretfully.

'That 's a grand drink! Ye 're a Christian.'

'I don't know about *that*,' said the gunner, turning the flask upside down. 'But *you* seem to have a pretty orthodox thirst.'

'Why don't you wear kilts in your lot, Jock?' asked some one.

'Too temptin' for the girrls. The Co'nel thought to gie you poor bastads a chance.'

Davison listened to the chaff and chatter quite happily. He was too tired to join in much, but he liked the sense of good fellowship. Of course, there was nothing particularly witty or clever or profound in what they said. The pleasantries were mostly very worn and mouldy, but what mattered was the spirit of these fellows, the immediate sense of friendliness. It was good to be with them. He wondered vaguely if similar trains were carrying the like parties away from the German lines.

An altercation broke out in the other end of the carriage. A man from the Rifle Brigade was arguing with a Sherwood Forester and a dismounted cavalryman that the light infantry were the finest unit in the British Army. The argument was drowned in catcalls and derisive shouts of 'Shut up! Put a sock in it!'

Davison began to scribble in the end of a Field Service message book:

'Distinguish between true and false comradeship. Men instinctively have a sense of loyalty to each other, which is the basis of all human society. This is wilfully perverted by governments—instruments of the ambitious and destructive—and becomes wholly evil. Loyalty to the Rifle Brigade is rot—he should be loyal to something better than that.'

As soon as he had written the words down he saw

they looked pompous, tore out the sheet, and threw it through the window. He still felt queer and dream-like. The crumping and lack of sleep perhaps. He kept thinking of those moments when he had stood on the hill-top looking towards the line, and had had that vision of the contest between the creative men and the destructive men. He felt it a turning-point in his life, a sort of vision on the Damascus road. Well, the destructive lot had it all their own way at present. It would take generations to put this mess straight—if it didn't wipe out the whole of civilisation. . . .

The duties at the Corps Signal School were comparatively light and interesting. Davison liked the two officers in charge, who were specialists, and not primarily interested in tormenting subordinates in the name of discipline. So long as you behaved yourself, you were not interfered with. An immense relief.

They ate in a marquee, and slept in new brown canvas tents arranged in neat rows beside duck-board paths laid over lush tall grass. The meadow was on the gentle slope of a hill, just outside a village, with a large wood behind it, and a château opposite. In the village was a knoll with the ruins of a medieval castle, destroyed by the English under Henry V.

Davison enjoyed his time there, and did a lot of thinking. He was only disturbed at the swiftness of the days. When the last parade of the day was over, he sat in a deck-chair outside his tent waiting for dinner. He had books, but found himself watching the swallows

and swifts darting and screaming over the great spreading poplars. A long confused reverie filled his mind. At night, as he lay in a camp-bed—so comfortable after dug-outs—he listened for hours to the far-off solemn roll of the guns.

He saw that the war had been wearing him down, that he had been about at the end of his tether when he had been relieved at the Sacrifice Post. He had never felt so windy in his life as during those few days. The place seemed ferociously hostile, somehow. As if it were particularly fatal to him. He dreaded the idea of going back to it. Luckily there were strong rumours that the Division was moving south.

But there was a good deal more to all this than a mere superstitious feeling about a particular place. He kept thinking over what he had felt that morning on the hill. It would have been great if he could have talked about it, but there was nobody he cared to trust. He had sense enough to see that his ideas and feelings would be displeasing to those in authority. Yet he couldn't help feeling and thinking. The trouble was that it was almost impossible for an ordinary uneducated Public School man to think coherently, let alone express his feelings. Whenever he tried to write down anything he felt, he was immediately disgusted. *That* wasn't what he had meant to say. If only he knew more, if only he could make others feel that vision, make them understand how they were duped into hatred under the guise of loyalty and duty.

Of course, it was impossible to do anything at present. If he even talked to the others—the fellows

who had been so pleasant and friendly in the train—he would be misunderstood. And if his feelings about the war got known, he 'd be nicely in the soup. Arrested, perhaps—got rid of, somehow.

But he went on, scribbling down his tumultuous and incoherent thoughts and feelings. And he made a decision. As soon as the war was over, he would get his father to send him to a University, Oxford perhaps, where he could learn all about everything, and how to write. And he would study for years, get himself really equipped, and then spend the rest of his life trying to help to put the muddle straight.

He noted :

' *Patriotism is not enough.* The best thing that has been said in the war. What is patriotism in an Englishman is nationalism, imperialism, arrogance in a German and vice versa. All nations teach their children to be " patriotic," " and abuse the other nations for fostering nationalism. But there is something good in patriotism, *i.e.* the sense of loyalty to something outside oneself. The loyalty isn't wrong, but the object of the loyalty. Nationalism is now a great enemy of civilisation, one of the most dangerous forces in the world. " Dein Vaterland muss grosser sein." Our loyalty must go to all men of goodwill throughout the world who are striving to construct—even then we must watch that the construction is right, and not a disguised form of destruction. And, if we must fight, let us fight those who exploit and destroy mankind.'

He made many such notes, and read them over daily. He was bitterly dissatisfied with them ; they didn't

really express what he was striving after—the creation of a sense of loyalty to what is best in humanity. On every page he wrote : ' In ganzen, guten, wahren, Resolut zu leben.' The thought of Goethe somehow comforted him as he agonised in sleepless nights. Goethe had refused to hate the French merely because they were French, because they lived on the other side of a river and his own rulers had chosen to quarrel with them. Evidently, Bill Davison was not Goethe. But, for the matter of that, neither was a Church of England parson St. Paul. He noted :

' Odd how the Churches have become devoted to nationalism too. They are all praying and preaching and snorting for the triumph of their own nation. They must think God 's a silly fool. I wish I knew more ecclesiastical history. How on earth did it come about that all the things denounced in the Gospels are violently defended by the Christian sects ? But we must grow out of religion. It is either bugaboo, formalism, or hysteria. Besides, what proof is there that " the Churches " know anything more about " God " than the Cockney sentry on duty outside this camp ? We 've only their say-so. And it 's damned dangerous to teach men that God will punish them if they fail in their duty. They find out that they aren't punished, that they can get away with any villainy so long as they are able to diddle or square the police. The whole system 's wrong, and so is the code of " duty " taught. All this must be changed.'

IV

The day before the Course disbanded, Davison was late for first parade. He rushed from his tent, leaving his notebook open on his bed, instead of hiding it in his valise as usual. When he came back for lunch the book had gone. He sent for his servant, and questioned him, but the man said he had not seen it. Davison was worried, and his anxiety was not decreased when a message was brought him that he was to report to the Orderly Room at four.

He found the two officers sitting at a table with his notebook in front of them. They looked a bit threatening and uneasy—a great contrast to the friendly manner to which he was accustomed. Realising that this was to be a strictly official meeting, he saluted and stood to attention. The senior officer acknowledged the salute.

'Is this your notebook, Davison?'

'Yes, sir.'

He paused for just a fraction of a second, and then, his annoyance got the better of his discretion, and he added:

'May I ask, sir, by what right it has been taken from me? It is my private property.'

'The orderly sergeant found your servant sitting on your bed reading it when he ought to have been on parade. He brought the book here in discharge of his duty.'

Awkward! They had a perfectly good excuse.

'Did you write what is in the book?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Why did you write it?'

'Merely as a record of my thoughts, sir.'

'They 're not notes of speeches or anything like that?'

Davison could not help laughing:

'Good heavens, no, sir! I never made a speech in my life.'

The two officers exchanged glances, and the junior nodded.

'You are absolutely clear that this is a private notebook, and that you did not intend to commit any of its contents to the troops or your brother officers?'

'Quite clear, sir.'

'Well, I 'm ready to take your word for it. Of course, it 's incomprehensible to me that any British officer could think such putrid revolutionary rot, let alone set it down in writing, but so long as you keep it to yourself I suppose it 's all right. You 've got a perfectly clean record, and your work at the School has been very good indeed. However, I shall have to report the matter.'

'Very well, sir. That is your affair. May I have my notebook?'

'I suppose I ought to confiscate it, but I hate to treat an officer in that way. Here it is, and try to serve your country less grudgingly in future.'

Davison flushed with anger, but restrained himself. He took the book, saluted, and turned to go.

'And, Davison . . .'

'Sir?'

'Remember that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.'

Between vexation and amusement Davison nearly laughed in his superior's face. The words were delivered with such crushing condescension, as if from some Sinai of knowledge and wisdom. Davison happened to know that in peace time the man had been a minor official in the Post Office—hence his undoubted skill in telegraphy. However, he merely saluted once more, and left.

Outside in the glare of the dusty road, Davison shoved the book into his pocket, and strode along angrily. He took a branch path to the woods, hoping to calm himself in the cool afternoon shadows under the trees. Damn carelessness, leaving the book about like that! But what cheek of them to read it. And the cheek of that parting shot. He laughed, and cut down a thistle with his cane. Well, he 'd had his first round with Authority, and lost badly. He 'd have to go more cautiously in future. Even the Army couldn't stop a man's thinking, though apparently it might object to a private notebook.

V

Going up the line again was a rather rotten experience. Instead of the gay sunlight and laughing companions he had come down with, he went up with nine glum individuals, who sat in darkness without a word. All except one of them, an American just out, who told them all about the war interminably. He then told

them exactly how he would have stopped the Russian Revolution. Finally, after about an hour, he was silent. From the opposite corner came a gentle but audible snore. That was the only piece of comfort on the whole journey.

At rail-head he was told that his valise would be sent after him, and that he was to proceed to the transport lines at once.

'Can I get a lift?'

'You can jump a lorry if you find one,' said the R.T.O., 'I don't control any transport.'

'Is the Division still in the same place?'

'Yes, I think so. There 's a rumour that you 're moving next week, but it 's only a rumour.'

The three weeks' rest had strengthened Davison physically and mentally, but it was a wrench to go back to the line again. He had been so absorbed in his thoughts, in his plans for what he would do after the war, that he had almost forgotten he was still a soldier, that the Germans were still attacking, that the end looked further off than ever. And he had that superstitious feeling about the advance post—that was why he has asked the R.T.O. if the Division was still there. He didn't mind much where else he went, even into a push, but that beastly Post had got on his nerves.

It was rather worse when he got to the hill-top where he had stood and looked back at the line. The road in front plunged into bottomless darkness. All along the twisting snake of No Man's Land he could see the Verey lights rising silently, each shedding a cold misty halo of vague luminosity. The flashes from

the night-firing seemed to split the darkness with yellow gashes. To the north a big raid or local attack was in progress—he could hear the fierce gallop of the guns and see the flicker of the bombardment above the horizon. A night-jar came churr-ing down the road, and made him start.

He found Johnson, the transport officer, after a long and toilsome march.

'Hullo, old man, you 're late!'

'Yes, there was no transport at rail-head. Couldn't you send anything?'

'No, sorry, everything 's in use. The limber 'll bring up your valise to-morrow.'

'Am I to doss here to-night?'

'No. There 's a chit to say you 're to report to the C.O. at once.'

'Good Lord! After a six-mile walk, at one in the morning!'

'I think they must want you to take over the signallers. The S.O. got a blighty yesterday—a nice one right through the shoulder.'

Davison felt relieved.

'I expect that 's it.'

The Adjutant was sitting alone in the dug-out when Davison got there, about half-past two. Davison was frightfully tired, and it seemed so obvious that he would be made signal officer that he slipped off his pack as he came in. The Adjutant looked at him, and asked him coldly what he thought he was doing. Davison was struck by the difference in his manner—so friendly

when he went down the line, and now so contemptuously official. He stammered :

'I—er—I 've had rather a long journey, sir. I 'm just back from the Corps Signal School.'

'I know. We expected you hours ago. You are to go at once and relieve Frazer in the advance post. Take your servant with you, and start immediately.'

Davison looked at the Adjutant with bewildered anxiety. He almost asked if there were not some mistake. It seemed absurd to pick him out of the line and train him as a signal officer, to do him this favour because of his length of service and because apparently the C.O. liked him enough to want him at Headquarters, and then, when the very job he had been trained for was vacant, to send him straight into the worst job on the battalion front.

'But . . .' he said, and then stopped short—he remembered the notebook and the threatened report. He silently saluted and went out.

The night was cloudy and still very dark as he went up the too familiar trench. There was not much night-firing, but as he got near the Post he could hear the dull crash of minnies at regular intervals. He felt an almost sick apprehension of the job before him, a frantic terror. Something awful was going to happen. He wanted to turn and run back to the C.O., beg not to be sent to the Post, tell him he could and would do anything, go anywhere, so long as he was not sent to that place. . . . The huge mechanical will behind him made him walk on.

The minnie strafe had ceased when he got to the Post. A Verey light went up, and he saw the pill-box and two sentries crouching by the parapet. He heard Frazer's voice close at hand :

' Hullo, Davison, you 're very late. Did you have a good time on your Course ? '

Davison suddenly felt that he must tell Frazer everything, that he *must* give some one his vision. He wanted to explain all he had felt and thought, make Frazer see how they had all gone wrong, how they must make life quite different . . .

' I had a wonderful time. In fact it will change the whole of my future. . . .'

Crack-swiss—a flight of machine-gun bullets snapped along the trench in enfilade. Davison choked, collapsed at ankles, knees, waist, shoulders, and fell back on his servant.

' He 's hit, sir ! Where is it, sir ? Mr. Davison ! Sir ! '

Frazer knelt down and flashed his torch, keeping his fingers over the bulb to dim the light. He stood up.

' Bang between the eyes. He 's dead. Tell the stretcher-bearer to take the body down on a stretcher. And, send me a runner too. I must get another officer sent up to relieve me.'

' Very good, sir.'

THE LADS OF THE VILLAGE

THE LADS OF THE VILLAGE

'Where are the boys of the village to-night,
Where are the lads we knew?
In Piccadilly, or Leicester Square?
No, not there; no, not there;
They 're taking a trip on the Continong,
With a rifle and a bayonet bright,
They 've gone across the water
To meet the Kaiser's daughter,
And that 's where they are to-night.'

I

THE small old church of a very small old English hamlet stood on a last low spur of the downs. The hamlet itself was about two hundred yards away, as if it had gradually slipped down the hill, turning its back on the bleak church and bleaker downs to face the fatness and sleekness of the rich valley. But it was a poor little place. What prosperity was left in this specimen corner of a moribund agricultural England, was concentrated in a much larger village about three miles off, with a railway station of its own.

A man with a rucksack on his shoulders and a pipe in his mouth clicked open the lychgate. For over three hours that morning he had walked along the straight turf road on the crest of the downs—on his right, the wide valley, with towns and villages and woods and

patterns of fields faintly gleaming under a misty October sun; on his left, bare crumpled down country, with a farm here and there among clusters of shivering autumn trees.

No one had seen him pass—so empty are these downs even in an overpopulated island, as soon as you get away from the racing stables and strings of exercising horses. Beyond that, for miles, are only sky and bare down and clouds and scrubby bushes and broken stone walls and a few grey sheep. Before 1914, there were tens of thousands of sheep; but now there are only a few flocks.

Any person (and that is most persons) unaware of the results of the Great Push for Civilisation might have been surprised by Henson's behaviour. Sometimes he dawdled along with his chin on his chest, sometimes he walked at an almost frantic speed as if trying to get away from himself; occasionally he uttered a broken exclamation or clutched his hands together in a kind of unconscious desperation. Once or twice he sat down for a few minutes, and stared fixedly at the turf, where the grey earth showed through the damp grass blades. But whatever he did, he smoked incessantly and rapidly.

He had the ordinary young-old subaltern's face. It was animated enough when he was talking, but in repose it immediately formed into a mask of weariness, sadness, and concealed suffering. So ordinary a sight, so ordinary a person, as scarcely to be worth describing. Just a touch of 'war nerves'—sort of thing to blow over with a little healthy exercise. So the doctor had

said. Oddly enough, several years of healthy exercise hadn't made much difference. Still, he wasn't aware himself that anything much was wrong—he only felt a bit restless and anxious about things.

Henson crossed the churchyard and went out by the other gate. He was looking for a place to get something to eat, and knew that the idealism of a church is usually coupled in England with the decent realism of a pub. Halfway between the church and the village was a small oblong of flat ground with a new War Memorial on it. Henson went to have a look. The memorial was a grey granite Celtic cross left intentionally rough, with two polished slabs at its base. The slab facing the village was inscribed crisply:

TO OUR EMPIRE'S
GLORIOUS DEAD

On the other side were the following names:

Beatson, James
Dodge, John
Ford, Samuel
Judd, William
Naylor, Henry
Templeton, E. J. de F.
Wickham, Thomas
Wickham, William

Obviously, a very small and poor hamlet; in a village of any size the number of names would be doubled. Henson read both inscriptions, and stood contemplating them for some time, leaning on his stick. He even let his pipe go out.

II

The pub was a little old round thatched affair, called The Round Oak. Henson clicked open the latch and walked into the taproom. Its floor was bare red bricks, worn and scrubbed. There were two scrubbed wooden tables on trestles, half a dozen old Windsor chairs, a couple of wooden benches. There was a smouldering wood fire in the grate. On the walls hung a round dart-target with six darts stuck in it at various angles, like the arrows in St. Sebastian. There was a good deal of art, likewise. Among advertisements of local ales hung the features of the distinguished Mr. Johnnie Walker (still, it was claimed, going strong, but to a pre-war palate obviously going a bit weak), the lovely features of ' Bubbles,' and the imperial splendour of their Majesties King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. A calendar of racing events, a time-table of local trains, a carved ship mysteriously contained in a bottle on the mantelpiece, and the notice ' No Gambling or Swearing Allowed,' completed this microcosm of rural life.

There was nobody in the taproom. Henson sat down at one of the tables, and knocked with his stick. An elderly man, unshaved, with grey eyes, a wrinkled skin, and ginger hair going grey, came in through a door behind the bar, and looked inquiring.

' Good-morning, landlord.'

' Morning, sir.'

' Pint of bitter, please.'

The landlord filled a large glass mug from a cask, and stood it on the bar.

'Can you give me anything to eat?'

'Yes, sir.'

(It should be explained to those who are unacquainted with small country pubs, that a landlord is required by law to furnish food with his drinks, if called upon, but for some reason is generally strangely reluctant about it. Henson knew from experience what was coming.)

'What can I have?'

'Oh, anything y' like, sir'—cheerfully.

'Can you give me anything hot—cut from the joint, or a steak or chop?'

'Oh no, sir,' reproachfully. 'Can't give y' nothin' *'ot*, sir.'

'Well, what about some cold meat and pickles?'

'Sorry, sir, can't get y' no *meat*, sir'—still almost injured.

'Could you find me some bread and cheese to go with the pickles, then?'

'I 'll see what the missus can do, sir, but I don't know about the pickles.'

And the landlord departed, as one in a mood of dubious sorrow over an unreasonable request, which cannot be honourably refused.

Henson amused himself by throwing darts at the target and staring out the window.

After a long wait the landlord returned with a large hunk of very white bread, a slim piece of almost colourless Canadian cheese, very cracked and dry on one side,

some Danish butter, and six pickled onions (probably English) at the bottom of a large glass jar of vinegar. These he set on the table beside the beer, together with a plate and knife, with a great show of old-time, hearty hospitality.

'*There* you are, sir!'

'Thanks. Will you take something yourself?'

'Well, sir, thank y' very much, sir—p'raps I *will* 'ave a drop o' whisky.'

'Right.'

'My bes' respecks, sir.'

'Thank you.'

Henson began his colourless meal, thinking a little ruefully of the soup, omelette, veal, cheese, and wine he would have found conjured up in the remotest and humblest French inn. It was certainly odd how the historical tables had been turned there.

'Come far to-day, sir?'

'Only from Chaddleton.'

'Why, that 's eleven mile or more! On a walkin' tower, sir?'

'Yes, I shall push on to Prescot this afternoon.'

The landlord shook his head, and scratched it.

'It may be all right for gen'lemen as likes it, sir, but what I always ses is, let me ride. I reckon we 'd 'ave a motor service 'ere, if things wasn't so quiet.'

'Things quiet, eh?'

'Terr'ble quiet, sir, and business is, as y' may say, shockin'. Don't seem no money about no'eres. If me an' the missus 'adn't 'ad a bit put away, I don't know as 'ow we 'd be able t' keep on. Things 'as bin

that bad since the war, sir, that you 'll 'ardly believe me but there 's days and days I don't dror no more than 'arf a dozen pints, and them all beer. Don't 'ardly pay to keep bitter now, sir.'

' What do you think 's wrong ? '

' Well, sir, I don't rightly know, sir, it ain't f' the likes o' me to say, sir. But there don't seem no life in the place, seems dead. Nobody about, and the farms don't pay (so farmers say), and wages down, and the Manor 'Ouse shut up.'

' Is that the large grey stone house I saw across the meadows to the left ? '

' That 's it, sir.'

' Lovely old house. Why 's it shut up ? '

The landlord drew himself half a pint of bitter and leaned comfortably on the bar—obviously a man who loved to gossip.

' Well, it 's this way. That 'ouse belongs to old Mr. Templeton, our squire. Young Mr. Templeton we usto call 'im, though 'e 's near sixty now. They 're an old family, sir, lived 'ere time out o' mind. Well, sir, 'im an' 'is good lady 'adn't got but one child, the youngest Mr. Templeton as was. In 1914 'e was away at Oxf'd or Cambridge, or one o' them gen'leman's places, and, course, soon 's the war came 'e joins up, and a lot o' the village lads goes with 'im. Rare doin's there was up the Manor when 'e come 'ome afore 'e went to the front; dancin' and 'ollerin' they was till all hours. 'E was with the Yeomanry that went out som'eres Egyp' way, place with a crack-jaw name. . . .'

'Gallipoli?'

'Ah, that 's it, sir. Mr. Templeton was killed when they was landin' from the boats, and young Bill Judd with 'im. Mr. and Mrs. Templeton was all wrapped up in that boy, sir, an' 'im bein' killed seemed a'most as if it killed them. Mr. Templeton, 'e walked about lookin' as if 'e 'd found sixpence and lorst five pounds, if y' understand me, and 'is good lady took on that bad she wouldn't never go out, and died about three years ago. Then Squire, 'e shuts up the Manor, and goes an' lives abroad som'eres. I don't justly know where.'

'I see. And I suppose the young Squire and Bill Judd weren't the only ones killed from the village?'

'Lor' bless yer, no, sir. There ain't 'ardly a fam'ly but 's lorst some'un or 's got some'un in a 'orspital or a 'ome f' the blind or a 'sylum. There 's young Bill Judd now, I was a tellin' y' about. Good lad, 'e was, rode a 'orse like a jockey, and the best cricketer we ever 'ad. 'E was young Mr. Templeton's servant in the Army. 'Is father and mother lives up the Manor now as caretakers. But they don't seem to take no pride or pleasure in it. Old Bill Judd, 'e usto come in 'ere ev'ry evenin' pretty nigh 'e did, for 'is pint and a bit o' chat and a sing-song. Don't come in twice in a year now, sir. Seems kind o' 'opeless like. See 'im mouchin' along the road, I do, mopin' about like a lame mare what 's lost 'er first colt.'

The landlord lifted the bar-flap and went over to tend the dying fire. He skilfully moved the half-burned tree boughs, which jumped into quick flame. He crouched on his knees, and blew gently on the glowing wood.

Henson had finished his meal, and was stuffing tobacco into his pipe. Nervously he used too much energy, pressed the tobacco in hard with his first instead of his third finger; and had to re-pack it. The landlord went off into the back part of the house.

Henson leaned back in his chair, watching the smoke drift away from his pipe, and vaguely thought of what the landlord had been saying. Curious anaemia of country England. Coupled with a plethora in the towns. Eight men killed and, say, half a dozen permanently disabled, were a big loss for a tiny hamlet, especially with the young men all trying to get into the towns. And then, unemployment in the towns, and people with cars all trying to get out of the towns. What a whirligig. . . .

Outside there was a noise of heavy plodging hoofs, a creak of wheels, and a hoarse 'Whey-up!' as a cart stopped. Henson heard the driver get slowly down. Then the door opened, and a wizened little man with a ragged moustache, wearing corduroy trousers tied with string at the knees, a torn rusty coat, and a pre-Edwardian billycock hat, came in.

'Good-morning,' said Henson.

'Mornin',' said the man, almost sullenly, caught with the rustic *pudor*, that instant suspicion of the stranger, especially the 'gentleman' stranger, so inevitable in all country places of all lands.

He tapped at the bar, and the landlord came in.

'Mornin', Bert, 'ow 's Bert?'

'Middlin', Mr. 'Ood. 'Arf a pint.'

'Any news over to your way?'

'No, Mr. 'Ood, can't say as there is.'

The man drank two-thirds of his beer at a draught, and looked regretfully at the poor rest. Henson caught the landlord's eye.

'Give me a glass of port, landlord—perhaps you and this gentleman will join me.'

Everybody in a pub is a gentleman.

The landlord looked embarrassed.

'Can't give y' no gen'leman's port, sir, but I 've got some red woine.'

'Never mind, give me what you 've got, and have what you want yourselves.'

The sweet inferior red wine was foul. The other men wisely took bitter.

'Me an' this gen'leman,' said the landlord, displaying his social tact, 'was talkin' about the war.'

'Ah?' said Bert, non-committal.

'I was a-tellin' 'im about Mr. Templeton and young Bill Judd.'

'Ah,' said Bert. 'An' they wasn't the on'y ones.'

'If you was to take a look at our new War Memorial, sir,' said the landlord to Henson, 'you 'd see the names of all our glorious dead.'

'I saw it as I came along.'

'You did? And what did y' think of it?'

'Very handsome and tasteful,' Henson lied bravely.

'Cost a lot o' money, too, didn't it, Bert?'

'Ah.'

'If you know'd the stories of all them names y'd 'ave somethin' t' tell about, sir.'

'Well, tell me about them.'

The landlord shook his head.

'If we was t' stay 'ere jorin' t' midnight, sir, we wouldn't 'a finished with 'em. An' then there 's more as is as good as dead as isn't there at all. There 's young Martin over to B'mington Farm, now. You know 'im, don't y', Bert ? '

'Ah.'

''E was blinded up Eeps way, sir. Come out o' St. Dunstan's fit f' nothin', not a man's work. Weaves mats, or somethin' like that. Course, 'e 's got 'is pension, but what I always ses is, what 's a pension to a man what 's lost 'is sight ? See 'im walkin' past 'ere last week, with 'is ole mother 'olding 'im by the arm t' guide 'im, an' lookin' up at 'im pitiful like. Give me a turn it did, 'im with 'is scarred face—good-lookin' young feller 'e was too once—and 'er leadin' 'im along like a child. Gives up all 'er life to that boy, she does. But she ain't many years for this world, crackin' up fast she is, and then what 's goin' t' look after 'im ? '

'Union, I reckon,' said Bert.

'There 's two or three from round 'ere, sir, as is in 'omes som'eres, and one we know 's in a loonytic asylum. Was you 'ere, Bert, when Tom Philpot went barmy ? '

'Ah,' said Bert.

'What happened ? ' asked Henson.

'It was in 1918, sir. July or August, and they reckoned it was the 'eat. 'E 'd bin out three year or more, and this was 'is third leave. Corp'ral or ser-

geant or somethin', 'e was then. Day afore he was to go back to France, 'e was out all mornin', come back just afore dinner and says to 'is mother sharp like :

' " Where 's my kit ? "

' " Over there be'ind the door," she ses ; " what d' you want it for ? " she says.

' " They 're comin' over agen, ma," 'e ses, " they 're comin' over."

' She noticed 'is face was red as a beetroot, and 'is eyes all glassy.

' " Whatever 's the matter with y', Tom ? " she ses. " Now, sit down," she ses, " 'an 'ave yer dinner like a good boy," she ses.

' " I ain't got no time f' dinner," 'e ses, " they 're a comin' over now, and it 's my duty to be there," 'e ses.

' Well, sir, she couldn't stop 'im. 'E put on all 'is kit, fixed 'is bay'net, and went out an' stood in a ditch about 'arf a mile away, with his mother follerin' 'im all the way, and beggin' 'im to be a good boy an' come 'ome to 'is dinner. But 'e didn't seem to 'ear 'er. Presently 'e starts 'ollerin' : " Stand to ! Stand to ! " and fires off 'is gun. I could 'ear 'im 'ollerin' and swearin' and shoutin' " Stretcher-bearer ! " and bangin' away, and the bullets whizzin' all ways. 'Is ma was that frighted she run all the way to Squire's 'ouse to tell 'im. Squire, 'e telephoned to the p'lice, and 'bout four o'clock some soldiers comes up in a lorry to arrest 'im. By that time 'e 'd fired off all 'is bullets, and when 'e sees 'em 'e 'olds up 'is 'ands and ses : " I surrender," 'e ses. They was goin' t' court

martial 'im, but course, they found 'e was looney, and 'e ain't never come out.'

'Ah, an' won't,' said Bert.

'I 'm afraid there were a good many like that,' said Henson, 'though very few of them went mad so publicly and at home. I sometimes worry about 'em, and wonder where they are.'

'Union,' said Bert.

'No, no,' said Henson, rather impatiently. 'They must be properly looked after in special hospitals.'

'Union,' said Bert. 'Most of us hereabouts gets there sooner 'r later.'

'Why, do *you* reckon you 'll get there, Bert ? ' asked the landlord jocularly.

'Ah,' said Bert.

Anxious now to divert the conversation from these lugubrious memories, Henson addressed Bert :

'Had a good harvest this year ? '

'Pretty middlin' bad, sir. Barley was light, wheat was rusty, and oats was that chocked with they old drashuls they wasn't scarcely worth carryin'.'

''E works up to Dodge's farm, sir,' explained the landlord. 'Mrs. Dodge, what runs the farm, she 's a widow lady. 'Er good man joined up in '14, and died o' dysentery on 'is way 'ome wounded. Buried 'im at sea, they did. 'E was body an' soul o' that farm, sir, an' 'is widow, she tries to keep it on in 'is memory. She ses it 's all of 'im she 's got left—she ain't even got a grave to put flowers on of a Sunday like. But it 's a losing game, sir, no woman can't run a farm proper, can they, Bert ? '

'No,' said Bert. ''Tisn't like it was in the old days, no'eres. I mind the time now when we 'ad 'arvest 'ome reg'lar ev'ry year. Proper ole bust-up there was, and beer as 'd get y' eyes poppin'. Farmers brewed their own ale then, they did, and there wasn't no talk about hours. Worked b' moonlight, we did, often. But farmer, 'e give us all the strong ale as we 'd a mind to. Brewed it in March and October, they did, and y' drank the March ale from October t' March, and the October ale from March t' October. Proper rare ole stuff 'twas. But 'tis all gone now. 'Tisn't no more what 'twas when I was a boy.'

Henson rose to his feet and paid what he owed.

'I turn to the right for Prescot, don't I, landlord?'

''Arf a minute, sir, I 'll show y'.'

The landlord came to the door.

'Go back past the church, sir, turn sharp right and on till you come to a' empty cottage—where ole Bill Wickham and 'is boy lived—and then bear to the left. There 's a signpost.'

'Good-day,' said Henson to Bert.

'Good-day, sir.'

'Good-day, landlord.'

'Good-day, sir, thank you, sir.'

Henson stopped and had another look at the War Memorial. Some of the names had become more than mere names to him now. He half regretted that he had checked the flow of reminiscences. What were the stories of Beatson and Naylor, who had not been mentioned? But no, it was right to go. Somehow one must get away from all this death and suffer-

ing and destruction and mourning and agony. A new life must be built up. But by whom? There might be one generation with too many memories and wrongs. . . .

He half saluted, a bit conscious that his gesture might look theatrical, and turned away. From the hedge he picked a crimson rose-hip, and stuck it in his button-hole. He began to whistle an old marching song, to show how cheerful he was—'Where are the Boys of the Village?' But he stopped whistling abruptly when he came on the empty cottage of the Wickhams, whose names were on the granite cross. It didn't seem quite the right tune to cheer up on somehow.

LOVE FOR LOVE

LOVE FOR LOVE

I

LIEUTENANT HENDERSON was a little uneasy in his mind. Of course, it was jolly nice in one way to be left out with the nucleus when the rest of the battalion went into the line. Made a jolly pleasant change after four months in and out—Front, Support, Reserve, Rest. But still, being left out always looked like a criticism. Did the Colonel think he was getting windy? Oh damn, anyway, what did it matter?

The officers at Divisional Rest Camp slept in large wooden huts, partitioned into small rooms. Each room was big enough to hold wire and sacking beds for two officers, with a rough table for washing and shaving. Henderson had been lucky enough to get a room to himself. He wrapped himself in a blanket, arranged his pack as a pillow, lay on the bed, and lighted his pipe. It was after dinner, in June 1918. He had left the mess early, because it was such a treat to have a few hours to oneself. In the gathering twilight the room was already nearly dark, but he didn't light the candle stub, just lay there, smoking, and thinking about things—the months and months and months of the war, the fellows who were dead, the fellows who had clicked lucky, the girl in England. Henderson gave a little wriggle—damn silly to start thinking about a girl like that, made a fellow restless. And as for red-lamping or

square-pushing with estaminet girls—napoo, thank you. Take the blooming girl back a decent body. . . .

A heavy man, with hobnail boots, came lumbering and cluttering along the narrow passage, muttering profanely as he stumbled in the darkness. He stopped outside, and Henderson could feel rather than hear him groping. Then—tap, tap, on the wood and sacking door.

'Hullo!'

'That Mr. 'Enderson, please, sir?'

'Yes. What is it? Come in.'

The grizzled Mess sergeant, as artful an old sweat as you could hope to meet, pushed open the door, and looked in.

'Beg pardon, sir. Orfficer out o' your battalion, sir, just come up the line, sir. Ain't got no servant nor nothin' with 'im, sir, and the Camp Commandant says, 'is compliments, an' would you mind sharing y' room an' servant with the other orfficer until to-morrow, sir.'

Henderson swore to himself. Just like the bloody Army! They pretend to give you a few days to yourself, and then, first thing, they shove some blighter in to kip with you.

'Who is he, sergeant?'

'Mr. Henley, sir. One o' your "A" Comp'ny orfficers.'

'Oh, all right. My compliments to the Commandant, and I shall be very happy to share my room with Mr. Henley.'

'Very good, sir.'

'And, sergeant.'

'Sir?'

'You 'd better detail some one to send my servant up here at once to look after Mr. Henley.'

'Very good, sir.'

'Has Mr. Henley been on a Course?'

'No, sir. Just back from Paris leave, sir.'

'Oh. All right. Good-night, sergeant.'

'Goo'-night, sir. Thank y', sir.'

Henderson sat up, swung himself from the bed, and lit a candle. A nice bloody game, if you like, sending a fellow from 'A' Company to cabbage his roost and servant. They wouldn't dare ask a sergeant-major to share his batman, but the poor blinking subaltern. . . . Ah well, never mind, when this bloody war is over, oh, how happy we shall be . . .

A voice outside said :

''Ere 's Mr. 'Enderson's room, sir.'

Henderson said : 'Come in,' and his servant opened the door for an infantry officer. Even in the dark, Henderson noticed the bright red triangle on his sleeve which meant 'A' Company, so different from the yellow of 'C' Company, his own. Little things like that seemed awfully important; the red triangle made the other officer seem much more strange. He was a short, dark man with very white teeth and a rather flushed face. He apologised very decently for his intrusion, as Henderson's servant unpacked and arranged his kit. He said it wasn't his fault. The Commandant . . .

'That 's all right,' said Henderson, with a heartiness which surprised himself. 'Very glad to have you.'

'Anythink more I kin do, sir?' asked the servant.

'That 's all right,' said Henley.

'Good-night, sir.'

'Good-night.'

When the servant had gone, Henley began fumbling with his pack.

'Brought a bottle o' whisky back from Paris with me. Got a mug? Let 's have a drop.'

Henderson produced a collapsible tin mug, and Henley poured out a large dose for each of them.

'Cheerio!'

'Chin-chin!'

'Had a good time in Paris?'

'A 1.'

'See any shows?'

'No.'

'No bon in Paris, are they? Why didn't you go to Blighty?'

'Couldn't. Easy enough to get Paris leave if you 've got enough service, but with these wind-ups about offensives, Blighty 's further off than the moon.'

'I know. I 've been out four months this trip. 'Course, all my other service counts as nothing. I 've as much chance of leave as the last kid in the last draft.'

'Have another whisky?'

'Right-o.'

The two men began to undress for bed. Henderson couldn't help noticing that Henley seemed to be in a curious state of excitement. In a way his conversation

was perfectly normal and ordinary, just the usual set phrases which all subalterns used to each other, but his manner was queer and excited. Henderson wondered how many whiskies the fellow had absorbed on the way back from Paris. Rotten thing coming back off leave—makes a fellow slack and windy.

Henley, with his trousers still on, pulled off his shirt, and his naked body gleamed faintly in the candle-light. With amazement Henderson noticed that his chest, shoulders, and arms were covered with small crescent-shaped red blotches. A very strong odour came from his arm-pits.

'I say! Excuse me—you 've got funny marks on you.'

Henley looked at his body, and smiled in a curious, rather sensual way.

'Oh! Those!'

'Yes, what are they? Lice?'

'No. Kisses.'

'Kisses!'

From outside came the beating of a stick against the wood wall of the hut, and a loud voice said:

'Lights out, gen'lemen, please! Air-raid warning. Lights out, gen'lemen, *please!* They 'll be over in 'arf a minute.'

Henderson blew out the candle, and they both listened, holding their breath.

From far away overhead came a soft buzzing vroom-vroom-vroom-vroom. German bombing-planes.

'Does this often happen?' asked Henley.

'Every night, so far as I know. They 've got

trenches outside for the men to get into, but of course the officers not on duty always stay in the huts.'

'Of course.'

They were silent again, listening.

Vroom-vroom-vroom-vroom. Much nearer.

They got into their respective beds, and made as much noise with blankets and packs as possible, to quench that ominously growing 'vroom-vroom-vroom-vroom.' It wasn't so much the possibility, even probability, that the camp would be bombed; that was almost inevitable. The point was that so much night-flying often preceded an attack—you sent up airplanes to drone about all night to hide the noise of clattering artillery caterpillars and transport.

Yet Henderson felt a bit more queer and jumpy than was justified by any amount of air-raids. It was a mixture of things—the unexpected rest, the uneasiness about his nerve, the scent of the fields flowing softly out of the June night, the upset of having Henley pushed on to him. But it wasn't only that . . .

Vroom-vroom-vroom-vroom. Then, quite a long way off a deep-toned boom, followed by another, and then two close together. Bombing rail-head probably.

The air was sweet with the scent of bean-flowers. Henderson filled his pipe in the darkness, and heard the other man give a deep sigh. He struck a match to light his pipe, and saw Henley lying on his back, dressed except for his tunic, staring in front of him.

'Put that bloody light out!'

Aeroplane picket.

Henderson got his pipe alight, and dropped the

match. He mentally cursed Henley. Why the deuce should he come in, with some confounded tart's kisses bitten all over his body, bringing the woman's very presence into the room? Of course, he was lying there, thinking about her. There! The blighter sighed again.

Vroom-vroom-vroom-vroom.

Henderson felt he couldn't stand any longer the silent suspense—the night, the darkness, the droning planes, and the warm sensuality which seemed to emanate from Henley. Why, the woman might be in the room; he could almost smell her rice-powder. Damn the fellow.

He tried to speak casually:

'How much leave did you get?'

'Ten days.'

'Have a good time?'

Vroom-vroom-vroom-vroom. Boom! Jove, that wasn't far off!

Henley didn't seem to hear the bomb. He sat up abruptly and peered at the glow of Henderson's pipe.

'A good time?' he said slowly. 'You asked me that before. If I said I 'd had the time of my life—but no, you wouldn't understand. . . .'

'Why shouldn't I?'

'Because you 're probably like I was until ten days ago.'

'What d' you mean?'

Henley spoke hesitatingly, plainly hunting for words to express deep confused emotions and sensations altogether new to him:

'Well, you know how we 're brought up. Respecting women and all that. Then everybody talking smut and making fun of sex. I always thought it was O.K. The idea apparently is that you keep clean by being dirty. Rum idea, isn't it?'

'Yes, I 've sometimes thought that myself.'

'You have? That 's damned interesting. You know, all the way up in the train, I 've been trying to think it out. According to all I 've been told, I 've been living like a dirty hound in Paris. But I don't feel dirty, I don't feel a hound. I feel fine and wonderful and clean. I feel as if I 'd really come alive for the first time. As if the air were suddenly pure oxygen. . . . Oh, damn, I can't explain it.'

'I think I understand you. As a matter of fact, you 're lucky to have broken the net of lies and stupidity. Something of the sort happened to me about a year ago.'

'And you don't regret it?'

'Good God, no. As you said, one really comes alive. . . . But what happened in Paris?'

'Well—of course, this is all in confidence—as a matter of fact I met a girl in Paris.'

'I 'd rather guessed that.'

'She 's the most lovely and fascinating creature that ever existed.'

'I 'd guessed that, too. I suppose she 's an orphan whose father was an officer killed in the early days of the war?'

'Why, yes, but how on earth did you guess that?'

'Oh, I 'm Scotch. There 's second sight in my family.'

Vroom-vroom-vroom-vroom. Swiss! Boom! Unpleasantly near when you can hear the fall as well as the burst. Swiss! Boom! Damn him, why can't he drop his beastly eggs somewhere else, instead of worrying the poor unfortunate infantry? Have a heart, Fritz!

'Yes,' Henderson went on. 'And she had a girl friend with her, and they shared rooms or a flat?'

'Good Lord! Has somebody been telling you about me?'

'Oh, no. Just second sight, you know. But I can't see any further. You must tell me the rest. By the way, how much money did you spend?'

'About eighty pounds.'

'Um. Not bad for ten days. How did you manage to get it?'

'Well, that was rather odd. I always went to the Field Cashier in the afternoon, and drew ten pounds. Generally spent by lunch next day. But she and her friend always left me at two, and I met them for dinner at seven.'

'Did she say why?'

'Oh yes, she was quite frank about it. You see, Yvette's friend had a man friend—some wealthy chap who makes motors and pays for the flat. Yvette said that if he saw me at the flat he might think her friend was going about with men. Quite understandable, isn't it?'

'Oh, quite.'

'And he 's been very good to Yvette, too, you know. Gave her money and all that. I wanted to thank him, and pay him back, but she wouldn't let me.'

'No. I suppose not.'

Vroom-vroom-vroom-vroom. 'I 'd put five bob in the poor-box,' thought Henderson, 'if that Boche were brought down. Why the hades aren't there any Archies back here?'

'Oh, she 's a wonderful girl. Dead straight, you know. I can't tell you how lovely she is. Everything about her so fine and delicate—always used to the best—I never knew women had such exquisite things. D' you know, one day she wanted a new handbag—she had about a dozen—and it cost eight pounds ten.'

'Um. Of course, you got it for her?'

'Of course I did! Nothing 's too good for her, you know.'

'Um.'

'I 've never seen or touched or dreamed of anything so lovely and exquisite as her naked body. Milk-white satin. Those Kirchner pictures are nothing to her. Every time I made her—you know—she marked me with a bite-kiss. There 's forty-four of 'em. Forty-four marks of supreme happiness. God! If that old Boche dropped a pill on us now and blew me to hell, he couldn't prevent me from having lived. I didn't know one could be so happy, that another human being could change everything like that.'

Vroom-vroom-vroom-vroom.

'But I don't want to die. I want to live—for her,

with her. I asked her to marry me, but she wouldn't even get engaged. Said it wasn't fair to a girl to ask her to marry a soldier. Après la guerre, perhaps. I said I 'd work my fingers to the bone for her after the war, if only she 'd marry me.'

' Um. Well, it is a bit thick, you know, to ask nice girls to marry fellows like us. We 've got a bit coarse and all that in the line, you know. If I were you I wouldn't think about marrying her. Treat it just as a lovely episode. She gave you a damned good time on leave, but now you 're back in the line, just forget about her.'

Henley laughed scornfully and angrily :

' Forget about her ! Good God, I couldn't if I tried. I . . .'

He broke off speechless with annoyance.

' Oh, all right, old chap,' said Henderson soothingly. ' It 's your affair, not mine. I suppose you 're going to write to her ? '

' I damned well am, and I 'm going to send her half my pay to live on. She 'll wait for me. I know she will.'

' Sending the money directly to her ? '

' No, she wants me to send it care of her friend. You see, she 's got relatives—awful pious people—down in the country, and she may have to go and stay with them. The friend will send the money on.'

' I see. Well, good-night, old man.'

' Good-night.'

Vroom-vroom-vroom-vroom.

II

Henley went up the line first thing next day. Henderson, of course, had to remain at Divisional Rest Camp until the battalion came out on rest. Even when Henderson re-joined the battalion, he saw very little of Henley. Companies were very much self-contained units in the line, quite a long way from each other when a sector was being held in depth. So Henderson, with other, more urgent, matters to think of, practically forgot about Henley and his Paris adventure.

Then he heard that a raid had been ordered on their front, and that Henley had immediately volunteered to lead it. Henley was left out on the next tour, with the dozen or so men and N.C.O.'s who had volunteered to go with him, to rehearse the raid. Henderson wondered what had happened, and a couple of days before the raid mooched off into 'A' Company's sector. He found Henley sitting alone in the company dug-out, smoking. He looked pleased to see Henderson.

'Hullo, old bean! Haven't seen you for ages. How are you?'

'Very fit, thanks How are you?'

'A 1. Have a spot of whisky?'

'Thanks.'

'The butler 's forgotten the siphons, so you 'll have to have chlorinated water.'

They laughed.

'Any news?'

'Well, we hear you 're going on a raiding party.'

'Yes, Division want a prisoner. It 'll be Wednesday night—day after to-morrow. The artillery have worked out a damn fine box barrage for us. It 'll be taking toffee from children.'

Henderson hesitated.

'I don't want to be indiscreet—but, er, are things all right in Paris?'

Henley distinctly went a shade redder.

'Perfectly all right.' He paused a moment, and then went on confidentially: 'You see, there 's an M.C. and ten days' leave attached to this party if it 's successful. I don't care a hang about the M.C.—though, of course, Yvette 'll be pleased if I get it. But it 's the leave I want. I told the Colonel I didn't want to go to Blighty, and he thinks he can wangle me a fortnight in Paris. That 's what I 'm really doing it for.'

'I see. You know I wish you the best of luck in every way.'

'Thanks.'

It was on the tip of Henderson's tongue to drop some hint about his own suspicions concerning the loveliest of all women, but he checked himself. If he tried to put Henley wise, there would only be a row. And maybe she was all right. One couldn't know. Only Henley was so confoundedly innocent, and his tale had sounded very fishy. Ah well, what 's the good of worrying about little things like that when there 's a war on?

The raid was a success. Henderson's company was

in support, and he watched the raid from a sentry-post. Of course, he didn't see the men leave the front-line trench, but he had an excellent view of the box barrage. The artillery, trench mortars and machine guns gave the Boche merry hell for ten minutes. He retaliated rather wildly and feebly—Henderson vaguely wondered why.

The news soon came down the line that a prisoner had been captured at the expense of only one man killed and two slightly wounded. Henley was all right, and in high spirits. Henderson spoke to him for a moment as the raiding party, with their blackened faces, went down the trench to Battalion Headquarters. Henderson dragged him into a signallers' shelter, and gave him a large tot of whisky. Henley was still panting from the exertion, and his blackened face looked grotesque and agonised. His tunic, breeches, and puttees were torn to pieces by wire. There was a deep bleeding scratch on his face, and blood where the wire had torn his thigh. He wouldn't wait for a field-dressing, but hurried off almost at once to Battalion Headquarters.

The Colonel shook hands and congratulated him :

' You put up a good show, Henley, and I 'm proud of you. The prisoner 's been sent down to Brigade under escort. You 'll get your M.C. all right.'

' Thank you, sir.'

' Anxious about that leave, I suppose, eh ? Mind you behave. . . . What is it, now ? '

The last words, a bit pettishly to the Adjutant, who had come into the dug-out with a message in his hands.

'A runner from Brigade just brought this, sir. Our attack on the Somme, with the French and Canadians, has succeeded beyond all expectations. We 're going straight into the blue on a twenty-mile front. We have orders to move at once. The relieving troops will be here in a couple of hours.'

The Colonel read the message carefully, and then said: 'Warn all the companies at once. I must go and see the Brigadier.'

As the Adjutant went out, the Colonel turned to Henley:

'You 'd better rejoin your company at once, Henley, and get cleaned up. I 'm sorry to say all leave 's cancelled. It 's very hard luck on you. Very hard. I 'll try to make the Brigadier stretch a point, but . . . Anyhow, I 'll see that you 're put at the very top of the leave list.'

'Very good, sir.'

Henley saluted and left. He suddenly felt rather tired and blank, and the cuts on his face and legs began to hurt.

III

It wasn't the Army's fault that Henley didn't get his leave. Every man, and especially every officer, was needed in those few frantic weeks. Foch's policy was: Attack, attack, attack. It was essential that the Germans should not be given time to recover, and not a man could be spared. But it was natural that Henley should feel a little sore.

Then, suddenly, almost before they could realise

what was happening, there came the Armistice. On the evening of the 11th, the Adjutant sent for Henley.

'Hullo, Henley. We can send four officers on leave, but the Colonel says you 're to go first. You want to go to England, of course?'

'No, sir, to Paris.'

'To Paris! What on earth for? Oh, well, it 's your affair. I 'll have the passes made out and sent round to "A" Company Mess to-night. I 'm afraid you 'll have to lorry-jump most of the way, though.'

'All right, sir.'

'A' Company was billeted in a house with a large garden. Henley, instead of going into the mess, turned into the garden, and stood on a low mound which had once perhaps been a rockery. The night was windless and rather warm for the time of year. There were faint haloes of light in the sky, where the stars gleamed through thin cloud. And the silence, the blessed silence, like some wonderful soothing medicine to the soul. He listened intently. Not a single gun, not the faintest rumble of artillery. For the first time in years, night had descended over northern France without the accompaniment of gun-fire. Some of the men in another unit were amusing themselves by shooting off Verey lights and S.O.S. rockets. But in a day they had lost their dread significance, and now were nothing but a Brock's benefit.

But Henley was thinking, not of the war, but of Yvette. Like gentle rippling waves, peace and hope

seemed to be flowing into him. He felt so glad that all through those last hectic months he had never let a week pass without writing her a letter, and sending her as much of his pay as he could spare. Sometimes she had answered, in a funny scrawling hand, partly in French and partly in very comic English. She always called him ' Mon bien cher Jeannot,' because he had told her his name was Johnny. He shivered at the sudden thought that he might have been killed—like so many thousands and thousands of better men—and never have seen her again. But, now . . . ! In twenty-four hours he would be with her again. He 'd make her marry him, she wouldn't dare refuse. Then he 'd get demobilised, take her back to England, the Army would find him a good job, and they 'd have a nice little home of their own. God, it was almost worth enduring the foulness of the war to feel so happy. If only he could forget those interminable lines of silent wooden crosses, which kept rising up in his memory like a cold reproach. . . .

Henley was nearly thirty-six hours getting to Paris. All traffic was disorganised, they were a tremendous way from rail-head, and he had difficulty in getting lifts. He spent the night of the 13th in a large marquee, used as an officers' rest-camp, in a ruined village on the Somme. It was desolate, very isolated, and somehow he got the feeling that infantry officers had become very unimportant. They 'd served their purpose. He had difficulty in getting food, and was told he could sleep in the marquee—there were no beds. Everybody in

authority to whom he spoke was off-hand and rather shirty. But he didn't care. After all he was going to Yvette.

He got to Paris about four in the evening of the 14th. There seemed to be no taxis, though there were innumerable flags and signs of revelry. It seemed an interminable way from the station to Yvette's flat, but people were very patient in listening to his feeble French and giving directions. More than once he thought he was hopelessly lost.

Finally he found himself in the street, and glanced up at her windows. There was no light showing. Out perhaps, or air-raid regulations still being obeyed. He ran past the concierge, and tapped at the door. No answer. He tapped again, more loudly. No answer. He felt disappointed. The gods ought to have let her be there to welcome him, to hold him in her arms, and rejoice—perhaps with a little flattering tear or two—that he was safe, and that now they could be happy ever after.

Perhaps she was resting. He rapped again so loudly that he felt a bit ashamed. Then he became aware that some one was calling up the stairs :

'Hé, m'sieur, hé ! Qu'est-ce que vous cherchez ? '

It was the concierge. He turned and walked slowly down the stairs, and met her annoyed stare.

'Mais, qu'est-ce que vous cherchez, par là ? '

'Mamselle Yvette, Er—où——'

'Elle est partie.'

'Partie ? '

'Oui. She partie her amant, très riche. Gros

fabricant. She say—l'officier anglais he no bloody bon, he no money any more. Compris ? '

Henley stood blinking at her with his mouth half open. His immobility seemed to make her furious :

' Allez, sortez. You no bon, compris ? Mlle. Yvette partie, partie pour toujours, compris ? Napoo, fini. Allez.'

Henley still stared at her uncomprehendingly. She went off in a rage, muttering furiously to herself, and slammed the door of her little loge behind her.

Partie—officier anglais no bloody bon—partie pour toujours—napoo—fini. And then, like a wound—no money any more !

Napoo, fini. The pigeon-French somehow made his tragedy grotesque and sordid. Napoo, fini—what an epilogue to a lover's passion.

He remained for several minutes on the stairs, and then slowly walked into the street. The shock was so great, the destruction of his life so complete, that he felt dizzy-drunk. He kept whispering to himself : ' Where shall I go ? What shall I do ? ' over and over again, as if the words were some charm against agony, as if by asking the blind questions often enough he would find the solution.

For a long time he walked straight ahead, not noticing the weight of his heavy pack any more than the stick in his hand. He came at last to the Seine, and walked along the right bank from the Place de la Concorde to Notre Dame. The lights of Paris were very dim, and glowed scarcely at all on the swirling river surface. He passed lots of people, many of them men in horizon

blue, all chattering eagerly and excitedly. Even now, little groups still went about arm-in-arm, cheering and singing. Paris, if not itself again, was certainly very merry. But Henley hardly noticed the people. As he walked, he kept saying to himself: 'Napoo, fini,' and then, 'Where shall I go?'

Near Notre Dame, stone steps lead down to the quay embankment. Henley sat down, with his folded hands on the knob of his stick, and his chin on his hands. He sat there for a long time, thinking. When he found he was shivering with cold, he got up slowly, shook his pack on his shoulders, and set out to look for a hotel.

THE CASE OF LIEUTENANT HALL

(*Extracts from a Diary*)

THE CASE OF LIEUTENANT HALL

(*Extracts from a Diary*)

12*th November* 1918. 'The War is over.' I never thought I should live to write these words. We were told about 7 A.M. Surprisingly little enthusiasm, but the men are fed up beyond human endurance. About 9 I was amazed to hear heavy artillery fire from the north. At first, we thought the Armistice news was simply another latrine rumour, and that the war was still on; afterwards I was told that the Canadians made a last hour attack. I celebrated the Armistice by sleeping most of the day in my billet. We are all worn out. After dark the R.S.M. came and asked permission for the men to fire off Verey lights and S.O.S. rockets as fireworks. The C.O. said 'Yes,' and told me to go and see no damage was done. It was pitch dark, but the whole Division seemed to be shooting off lights and rockets, once signals of deadly peril and suffering, now mere harmless fireworks. Some merry lads of another unit started throwing Mills bombs, to the terror of the civilians. (There 'll be a row about that. Don't they know there 's a peace on?) The S.M. fired a Verey light, which back-fired and nearly blew my head off. I told him firmly that I never had a fancy for being killed, particularly when the war was over.

Afterwards, I walked in the ghostly shades of the garden behind B.H.Q. The darkness was friendly, the silence almost divine. For a long time I stood looking at the stars, very dim among thin clouds. My feelings were too confused and profound for expression. If I could interpret that miraculous silence! As Villiers said, one needs four orchestras to do it.

Did not sleep very well, probably because I slept so long during the day. But I was, and am, still very tired, and glad to rest. I feel rather anxious about the future.

22nd November 1918. We are not going to Germany after all. Last night at dinner the C.O. gave the quietus to a hydra of rumours by telling us that we are to garrison a part of Belgium. The C.O. is going on leave, and Major Shanks will be in temporary command. This is bad news for me, since Shanks is a detestable fellow, and he and I get on badly. We are always rowing in Mess. If it weren't for the C.O. I should apply to go back to the Company. There is very little work for Intelligence Officer now.

I wonder how much longer we shall be kept out here? All the talk is of demobilisation, and the men are becoming extremely restive. I treat my little band of Observers very gingerly. We hear we are to become schoolmasters, and lecture to the troops on arithmetic and geography. The W.O. undoubtedly believes in getting its money's worth out of the infantry subaltern.

I worry greatly about demobilisation, and what I

shall do when I get free. Woke up in a sweat last night, dreaming I was in the line, and couldn't get to sleep again.

27th November 1918. Here we are in our new quarters. The C.O.—good fellow that he is—put off his leave to march us over and see us installed. He leaves to-morrow, and may not return. But he has arranged with the Adjutant that I am to leave as soon as my papers come through.

The place we are billeted in is most dreary, a long, straggling, dirty village in flat, desolate fields. The inhabitants resent having troops billeted on them, and the men are (rightly) dissatisfied with the filthy and wretched accommodation. I rode over ahead of the Battalion to see that all billets were ready. I have quite a decent bed in a cottage kept by a very clean woman with a little boy. I gave them some white bread, which the little boy had never tasted before. He thought it was cake. I don't know why this upset me, but it did. The misery of these people, the misery of this flat wintry land, lies on us all.

I had a rotten dream last night—those four Boches on the Somme. God! I wish that hadn't happened, or that I could forget it.

2nd December 1918. The C.O. has gone on leave, and that imbecile Shanks is in command. The first thing he did was to call an officers' conference, and tell us that the Battalion was getting far too slack. Discipline must be tightened up! That, when the troops

are madly fretting to be demobilised, and all sorts of rumours of mutinies are flying about!

To-day Shanks had a Battalion parade at 8.30. Some of the billets are a mile and a half away from the parade ground, which meant that the men had to get up far earlier than usual. It was bitterly cold, and he kept us there nearly two hours. The men shivered in the ranks, and three fainted. Shanks inspected every man minutely, and strafed like a lunatic. Then he made a most tactful speech to the troops. Told them this was not Peace, only an Armistice (as it is technically), and that the Germans might start the war again at any moment—a silly lie. He also said that we should not have won the war until we 'make Germany pay,' and that it would take at least forty years to collect the indemnities! The troops are frantic about it. I hear the Company Commanders have decided to go very easy with the men. I certainly shall. We don't want a mutiny.

10*th December* 1918. Row with Shanks in Mess last night. I have returned to the Company in consequence. Much more comfortable humanly, but their Mess is a long way from my billet. Shanks got on this eternal business of Making Germany Pay. I asked him if he thought we fought for money, and he flew into a temper and called me a Bolshie. I said it was men like him who made Bolshies, and he got purple in the face with rage. I turned aside and began talking to the Doc., who said—rather tactlessly under the circumstances—that there is great unrest in England.

I said I felt sure there would be enormous trouble with Labour. Shanks heard me, and said rudely that I and other Bolshie agitators ought to be shot. I thereupon left the Mess, and this morning asked the Adjutant for permission to return to the Company. No news of my papers. It is all extremely worrying. I don't know what I shall do in England, but at present all I want is to get shot of the Army. Of course, they can't demobilise five million men in a week, but they seem to delight in prolonging the torments of the P.B.I. What is the sense of keeping us week after week in these dismal surroundings? The 'classes' for the men are a wash-out. They are very peeved at being given dictation and sums to do.

I have slept very badly this past week.

26*th December* 1918. The C.O. is back—thank God—but I remain with the Company. He says nothing, but the Battalion notices the change in command. Several days this past month I feared Shanks would cause a mutiny. The swine 's going on leave, and every one profoundly hopes never to see him again.

On Christmas Day there was a dinner for the officers of the Brigade, turkey and champagne. Shanks got drunk, and revolted everybody by getting up unsteadily and proposing: 'The health of the Dead.' The Brigadier, who had accepted other toasts from him, ignored this; and Jackson, sitting besides Shanks, pulled him down into his chair. Shanks, who toadies to the Brigadier disgustingly, shut up for the rest of

the evening. I thought it a dismal party. Nobody really believes in the war or cares who won it.

My papers have not come, and I am beginning to despair. Everybody seems to be jumpy and disgusted. Stanton, commanding ' B,' has amazed everybody by saying he is going to take Holy Orders. He is a hard-bitten war officer, and some people thought, and think, it is simply a dodge to get early demobilisation. I don't believe it. I know Stanton intimately, and he told me some time ago that he received the revelation of God the day after the Armistice. He is a simple-minded man, and mistook his psychological processes, *i.e.* he thought his relief at the end of the war was God. But if it comforts him—why not ? The poor devil had his genitals hopelessly mutilated at Passchendaele —it 's a wonder he 's alive.

I 'm getting very worried about myself. I sleep very little, and pass the hours in a constant apprehension of some undefined horror or calamity. I can't settle to anything. It is all complicated with almost nightly dreams—horrible—of those Boches.

12th January 1919. The whole countryside is now deep under snow, and it is horribly cold. We have practically no fuel, except a little coal-dust which is utterly useless. In the Mess we sit and chatter with cold round a stove which is only kept alight by frantic efforts on the part of the orderly. The snow is too deep for walking, and parades are a farce. The men suffer less than we do in some respects, because they can sit round the kitchen fires of the peasants, which

etiquette forbids us to do. There is no coal to be bought, so we are going to buy and cut down some trees—if any can be found in this barren waste. We hear that the German prisoners are properly fed and warmed in huts, and at the same time we hear of further threats of mutiny among our own men. I am not surprised, if they are treated as we are. The Battalion is slowly dissolving as men are demobbed, but those left behind are getting almost frantic with impatience. We hear that the boys of nineteen are to be drafted to Divisions on the Rhine, and that 12 officers will be required to volunteer for service there. The Orderly Room had twelve names within an hour—some, officers who funk returning to civilian life; others, who will do anything to get away from here. It is too cold to write any more—my fingers are frozen.

13*th January* 1919. Another utterly dreary day—cold grey sky, a wind that seems to sweep acute particles of steel against the bare skin, and a landscape deep in snow. In the Mess we have long futile discussions. Interesting to see how we are beginning to shed military prejudice, and to take on civilian prejudice in our relations. For instance, the first officer to be demobbed was a young Jew in 'A' Company, who was a perfect wash-out in the line, and treated by everybody accordingly. Then it was discovered that his father had made a fortune out of war material, and an order came that he was to be demobbed immediately. They sent a car over from Division for

him. We watched him depart almost in awe, and he waved a patronising farewell.

Stanton has gone, and I am now very lonely. I spend much of the time lying fully clothed in bed for warmth, and brooding. It would be better if I did something, but what on earth is there to do? The nearest town is seven miles away, and we subalterns are allowed no transport at all. Even if we had horses it would be cruelty to ride them in this frost.

15th January 1919. Last night I had a curious experience. The moon rose in a clear frosty sky, and as I lay in bed waiting for my servant to warn me for dinner, I watched it through the frost patterns on the window. I thought it looked like a face, a yellow dead man's face swollen with corruption. Suddenly it seemed to me that this moon-face was the face of one of the men—I can't write the old insult 'Boche' any longer—I killed on the Somme. The most awful feeling of sick terror and apprehension went through me—infinitely worse than waiting to go over the top. I felt all the hairs creep on my skull, and I almost screamed aloud. I broke out in a cold perspiration, which was also a horrible experience in itself. What I should have done I don't know if my servant hadn't come in.

For the first time in months I got drunk in Mess, not so drunk that I fell about or even talked too wildly, but drunker than the others realised. I stayed as late as I could, and then got Connely to walk back to my billet with me. I felt I couldn't stand that horrible

moon-face alone. But to my surprise it was gone. The moon was high in the sky, very clear and small and silvery. I slept like a log, but have a rotten headache this morning. I am terrified of moon-rise this evening, but I know I shall have to look.

I tried to conceal it from myself, but after the shock of last night, I 've got to face the fact that my nerves are in a perfectly rotten state. Somehow or other I shall have to pull myself together. The scene of those four men I killed haunts me waking and sleeping. I can't get rid of it.

You remember where it was ? Yes, where it was ? Why did I do it, O God, why did I do it ? It was in 1916 in a trench near Trônes Wood. I was leading bayonet man as we were clearing out a trench, and I 'd got a traverse in front of the others. I must have been quite mad. The man behind me threw a bomb, and I rushed round the traverse as soon as it burst. I came on four Germans. They dropped their rifles, threw up their arms, and yelled ' Kamerad.' They were helpless before me, and I—God pity me !—I shot three of them, and bayoneted the fourth in the back as he tried to run. He screamed as he fell, rolled over, and looked at me with an awful expression of loathing, hatred, and reproach. I gazed at him in horror, shaking all over, with the rifle falling from my hands. That instant the platoon sergeant rushed into the bay, clapped me on the shoulder, shouting : ' Good lad ! Well done, indeed ! ' I dropped my rifle. He shouted : ' Pick up your hipe, and come on, there 's more of the bastards round here.' Of course, he

thought I had killed the men in fight—they were lying on the rifles they had dropped. Men shoved past me in the trench. I was violently sick. When I recovered, the sergeant was patting me on the back, and he gave me some rum to drink. I took my rifle and went on with him—we had won the trench. The face of the bayoneted man still glared horror and hatred at me as I stepped over his body.

The C.O. publicly congratulated me, and I got the M.M. and a recommendation for a commission.

16*th January* 1919. Last evening I drew my curtains at sunset, and lay in bed brooding for hours and hours until my servant came. I couldn't bear that moon looking in on me. I never felt so depressed in my life. It is obvious, now I look honestly at the future, that I have nothing to live for or hope. I 've been longing to get away from the Army, but what on earth am I to do in civilian life ? As far as I can see from the orders of demobilisation, all England wants are miners and agricultural workers, and men whose families have plenty of money. (They released an officer of nineteen yesterday—his parents have ' influence.') How much better it would have been if I 'd been killed on the Somme. But no. I purchased my life by murdering four helpless men and, like a coward, pretended I had killed them in fair fight. . . .

When I opened the cottage door to walk down to the Mess, I saw that ghastly moon-face glaring at me. It had just that same look of hatred and loathing. Hell ! It 's ghastly. For a moment I was frozen quite

motionless, with my hair rising on my head, and that filthy cold sweat on my face. Then I turned and ran like mad, slipping and stumbling on the frozen snow. I rushed into the Mess, and they all looked at me in surprise :

' What 's up ? What 's the matter ? '

I managed to pull myself together then, and said :

' Oh, nothing. It 's so bloody cold I ran along to get a bit warm before dinner.'

I was shivering all over, but my face was covered with sweat. Connely said :

' Well, you seem to have succeeded. You 're in a hell of a sweat.'

I pretended I was hot and sat near the door, though I was really chilled through. Connely gave me some vermouth to drink, and my hand shook so much I spilt half of it on my tunic. I pretended I had been for a long run, and that I was still shaking with the exertion. I felt rotten all through dinner, and I noticed they looked at me in a queer way.

After Mess, I left early. Connely got up, and said he 'd come with me—for which I was grateful. I took one glance at the moon—it still was that dreadful face, but smaller and more malignant. I looked on the ground all the way. Going along, Connely said :

' Are you feeling ill, old man ? '

' No. Why ? '

' Oh, nothing much. Only, the last few days we 've been thinking you look seedy and very worried about something. Is anything wrong ? '

I tried to laugh it off :

'I 'm as fit as a fiddle, old boy. But it 's hellish boring to hang about here day after day, with nothing to do, and damn-all in the way of amusement.'

'Yes, I know. But honestly, Hall, you do look rather ill, and you were positively ghastly when you rushed into Mess to-night.'

'Was I? Yes, I was awfully cold.'

'You said you were too hot.'

Luckily we then reached the cottage door. I said:

'Well, good-night, old man. Thanks for coming along.'

'Good-night.'

I ran in and shut the door quickly so as not to see the face. Of course, that damned servant had opened my curtains. I shut my eyes tight, groped my way across the room, and drew them close, close.

17*th January* 1919. Yesterday morning (the 16th) I felt so rotten that I sent my servant with a chit to the Company Commander, asking to be excused parade. I lay in bed all day, and my servant brought my meals. They were horribly cold, but I didn't mind. I just felt I couldn't face the world. I tried to read, but couldn't—just lay there brooding.

I got up for first parade to-day, and after breakfast was told to report to the Orderly Room. I saw the C.O. who was very nice, but questioned me closely. I told him there was nothing wrong, but that perhaps the extreme cold coupled with the lack of fuel had injured my health a little. He said:

'But we had much worse times in the line.'

'Yes, sir, but then we were under the stress of fighting. Now that 's over, we feel the strain a bit.'

'You 're sure there 's nothing on your mind?'

'Oh no, sir. I 'm only a bit worried about the delay in my demobilisation. I want to get back to work.'

He looked at me hard, and asked me if I had any work to do. I said yes, that the man who had signed the application for my release would give me work. This was a lie, but I feel I must get away from the Army and this ceaseless brooding—and the terrible face. Finally the C.O. said:

'Well, I want the M.O. to have a look at you. Go along to his billet now, will you?'

I saluted and left. I was afraid the M.O. would question me, and perhaps find out the secret, but fortunately he only sounded me, took my pulse, looked at my tongue, and said:

'M'm. Bit run down. Don't overdo it, and take three months' rest when you 're demobbed. Cheer-o.'

Take three months' rest! And on what?

Thank God it 's cloudy to-night.

18*th January* 1919. I got rather drunk again last night, and slept well until about four in the morning. Then I dreamed I was in a gas attack, and couldn't get my mask on. I woke up and found I had got the clothes over my head and was half stifled. Then I lay awake miserably thinking over old miseries—the Somme, Arras, Passchendaele, the utter weariness of it all—and gazing blankly at a blank future. I was glad when it was time to get up for first parade.

Connely came along to my billet about three this afternoon, and talked the usual out-worn topics for a time. Then he said :

' By the bye, Hall, there 's an order that each Company is to send an officer for two days' leave to Lille. We think you ought to go from our Company. You 'll get a change, you can stay at the officers' club, and—here he giggled rather self-consciously—' there 's a lot of " red-lamps " in Lille, you know.'

I don't know why, but this made me furiously angry. I told him they could shove their bloody leave he knew where. I said that since I had seen so many men's bodies mangled, suffering and dead, the thought of human flesh was repulsive to me. I said I hated the thought of women. I almost yelled at him :

' I don't want your bloody whores ! I don't want ever to touch a bloody woman. Didn't they urge us into that hell, and do their best to keep us there ? Look at Stanton, with his genitals mangled, becoming a bloody parson—poor devil. Women ? Pah ! '

Connely looked a little scared and surprised :

' Steady on, old man. Why so violent ? After all, think of young What 's-his-name in the A.S.C., who came and lunched with us—you know, the fellow who was so cheery because he was going home to get married on a hundred a year.'

' Yes—A.S.C. We 're P.B.I. Yes, get married on a hundred a year, condemn some infatuated female to an eternity of drudgery, and get her with kids to come out and be slaughtered in their turn. I tell you, Connely, we all ought to submit to castration rather

than beget children to be exploited and murdered like the men lying out there. . . .'

Then I did an idiotic thing, which makes me burn with shame to remember. I threw myself on the bed and cried. Connely was very decent about it. He came and patted me on the shoulder, and said :

' That 's all right, old man, I understand. Don't you worry. I 'll go to Lille. And—I won't mention this to any one.'

Then he went away.

I begin to be afraid of myself. The sleeplessness, constant dreams of being in the line, the haunting of those men I murdered, the moon-face, then flying into such a rage about nothing, and crying like a silly girl. Christ ! I wish I could get out of it all.

20th January 1919. ' Nothing to report,' as we used to send back from the line. I 've had practically no sleep for two days, and feel rotten. When I do fall asleep, I immediately wake up in horror, with a vision of that face of loathing and hatred threatening me. I believe that man meant to haunt me when he died. I feel his presence, his dreadful, decayed, loathsome presence in the room. Last night I had a feeling he was standing there, invisible, watching me suffer with a dreadful revengeful glee.

Funny thing—this morning I got out my revolver to see how it would feel to hold it against my head and perhaps end everything, and I found the bullets had been taken out. I questioned my servant, and he

knew nothing about it. Connely perhaps? He doesn't know I have twenty rounds in my pouch.

The cold is frightful. Lots of the men are being demobilised now. I begin to think I am doomed to Shanks's forty years' watch on the Rhine.

27th January 1919. I 've felt too wretched to write anything in this diary for a week. The same old tale —sleeplessness, boredom, worry, a sort of agony of contrition over the whole war, and my dastardly share in it.

But to-day comes good news. I am demobilised, and leave here on the morning of the 29th!

I should be happy if it were not that the murdered German—the bayoneted one—seems never to leave me now. I caught him gazing at me over the dinner-table last night. The others were amazed because I jumped out of my chair, and yelled: 'Go away! Go away! Don't torture me!' I apologised to the Mess President, and went straight back to my billet. Thank God, I 'm going, and haven't to face them much longer. I really must pull myself together.

31st January 1919. I am writing this in a vilely cold tent at the Base Camp, waiting for orders to proceed to England. Opposite me, I can see some German prisoners laughing and talking round a glowing stove in a hut. It looks really as if the W.O. particularly wishes to insult us in every way possible. We T.G. officers are treated more contemptuously than the men—the men can mutiny, we can't. I sup-

pose we could, but they know we won't. In these last two years the whole war (which was to purify every one's morals) has resolved itself into the most abject devil-take-the-hindmost scramble for safety. The demobilisation is if anything slightly worse. I 'd never have got away from the Battalion if they hadn't thought I was going to have a nervous breakdown, and therefore wanted to get rid of me. As for the cant which is being talked in England . . . Well, we 're helpless victims of the cowardice, greed, and gullibility of man and womankind, especially womankind. God, how I hate the women, especially those who ' gave ' so willingly !

Rotten journey down here, but I 'm told everybody who is too poor or too unimportant to be given a car has the same experience. However, it 's a great deal to be on the move towards freedom, and away from the ghastly Belgian landscape.

I started off early on the morning of the 29th in the Company Mess cart. We had a devil of a job getting through the snow—there was a heavy fall—and I had to help the driver shove the cart through the drifts. About eleven, I got to the town which is rail-head for our Division, and my valise was dumped at a huge empty house, which is the officers' club. The place was swarming with subalterns, none of whom I knew. I could get no food, so ate my iron rations, and then walked about the town. It has a very fine Romanesque cathedral, with only two shell-holes in the apse. There is a wonderful carved screen—a juba I think they call it—in front of the chancel. I spent a very happy

hour looking round the building—a reminder that there might be something else in the world beside blood, death, horror, mud, greed, money, money, money. When I think of the crimes of those who sent us to hell and kept us there, my own awful crime seems less unbearable. I understood Stanton—reject the world and live in prayer with the ideal. Unfortunately, I thought the head of the Christ looked like the bayoneted man. Perhaps I was wrong.

After dark a lot of the fellows started off for ' red lamps.' I opened my valise, which was thrown with others on the bare boards of an unfurnished room, and got down into kip. I was awakened by some of the others coming in, and did not get to sleep again. However, I lay on my side with my eyes shut and listened to their talk—mostly about the ' red lamp ' girls, and then what they would do in Blighty. They all seemed to be engaged to girls in England—foul. I was awake most of the night, listening to their heavy breathing, snores, and mutterings. Most of them seem to have awful dreams of the war. Their breathing would change to a snore, then to a groan which would become quite dreadful in its agony, and then abruptly stop as the man woke up. I felt deep pity for them—nervous wrecks before they 're thirty.

Next morning we were roused at five and given tea and more iron rations. Marched a huge column of men to the station, and entrained in cattle-trucks. We were all entrained by eight, but the train did not start until after one. We crawled through Belgium in the

afternoon twilight, ghastly over that dead landscape of snow. I have not felt such cold since the winter of '16. We crawled on with various long halts throughout the night, trying to keep ourselves warm over a brazier. About dawn we got to a station which had been in the old line—smashed to pieces. There we dumped the frost-bite cases, and got some hot soup. The shattered trees and broken buildings were all covered with the thickest hoar frost I have ever seen—more like snow. Everything glittered coldly in the early sunlight. It was late last night when we got here, handed over the men, and were told to look for places in the tents of the officers' camp. The other fellows in this tent are very decent, but furious at the way they are treated. To-day we went out and spent a lot of francs on a meal in a civilian restaurant—we all felt starved. I have got chilblains and a headache which started about a week ago and never stops. I wish I could do something about it. The German is very persistent these days. He came down the line with us, and I see him standing by the tent entrance, gazing at me steadfastly and with implacable hatred.

Later: I have just heard that I leave for England to-morrow morning.

1*st March* 1919. This diary has been neglected for a month. It has been very strange, returning to England, civilian life and ways, after the tremendous physical and moral efforts of the past years. I am confused, tired, and miserable. The perpetual head-ache, the sleeplessness, the nightmares, and that

infernal German—I can feel him behind me now, but I won't look round.

All this existence in London seems most unreal. What gave a false appearance of reality to our life in the line was that we were not—at least directly—merely slaves of the economic idea. We were slaves of the military idea. Our purpose, the purpose imposed on us, was to kill, not to make profits. No doubt, the military idea now is eventually the slave of the economic idea—military force is only the last weapon of commercial competition. But that is all covered over with decorations such as Honour, Country, Glory, Duty, and the like. It takes a little shrewdness to see that the people who own the land and the factories also run the Army. The Army is Tweedledee pretending to be Tweedledum, with a very big DUM! But I believe the apparent escape from the economic idea accounts for much of the enthusiasm with which people rushed into the war. (Of course, a lot of the first rush of heroes were unemployed who wanted food—odd to bargain your life for a few ill-cooked meals and a bad suit of clothes.) Personally I cannot see life either as 'your King and Country need you,' *i.e.* getting killed to further the material aims of people who manipulate these gross symbols—nor can I see it merely as 'paying one's own way.' At present it costs a great deal to pay one's own way. I imagine prices will remain high until the demobilised soldiers and munition workers have spent all—and that isn't much individually—they got out of the war. When their money has finally reached its destiny (*i.e.* the pockets of the War-makers)

it will be ' invested,' prices will decline, and there will be plenty of unemployment.

Even now, it is difficult for ex-soldiers to get employment. Many of us are in a rotten state, and quite unfit to perform those actions which would enable us to ' pay our way.' We are not an economically sound proposition, and it is too much to expect that industry (always so heavily burdened, as the *Times* says) should carry more than a small proportion of the war duds. I 'm one of the lucky ones—three pounds a week as a temporary clerk in Whitehall. The Colonel who interviewed me in the first instance was very nice. He asked particulars of my service, looked up my record, congratulated me on my murders, and said :

' Have you any influence ? '

' No, sir.'

' Don't you know any one in—er—a position of importance, who would give you a recommendation to—er—some respectable firm ? '

' I 'm afraid not, sir.'

' Well, we 'll do the best we can for you. Leave your name and address, and I 'll communicate with you.'

I started on my job to-day. I don't like it.

2nd March 1919. Yesterday I meant to write down the circumstances of demobilisation, the last day in the Army, but got diverted somehow. I find it very difficult to think consecutively these days. . . .

There were about fifteen officers and three thousand men on the boat. We landed at Dover, and with some

difficulty got the men—who were very restive and impatient—into column, and marched them through an indifferent town, up a long steep hill, to some huts behind the castle. I had never seen the castle at close quarters before—it has fine architectural qualities. We hung round the huts for two or three hours, queuing up for our ' tickets.' The officers got theirs quickly, and while the men we had brought were still waiting, we were sent off to march an earlier batch to the train. Each officer had about five hundred men, and they marched anyhow, yelling insults. I managed to get the front ranks of my lot singing, and soon they all joined in. At the station, I stood to one side and watched them march to the train where the N.C.O.'s took charge of them. Most of them shouted to me : ' Good luck, sir, good-bye ! ' And I shouted back : ' Good luck, good-bye.' That was the triumphal return we were promised. When the last of my lot had gone by, I turned and walked to the officers' compartment—a civilian again.

3*rd March* 1919. To-day I received the document granting me a commission, with the King's signature in facsimile at the bottom—a proud heirloom to hand down to my posterity, I don't think.

God ! I wish I could get out of it all. I 'm sick of putting down all the old miseries here. If I could sleep at night without horrid nightmares of the German I might be able to endure it—even the fatuous struggle with documents at the office. But I 'm as fed up with life as we all were with the war. I bought a Shake-

speare to-day, and the first words I read were Mercutio's: 'They have made worm's meat of me.' Very true, and clever of Shakespeare to foresee it.

7th March 1919. Of course, I tell myself it 's all nerves, but that German is certainly a curious phenomenon. I ought to write about it to some of those experts who collect ghosts. It may be a delusion, but it 's real enough to me. I don't see how I can go on living with the constant haunting of that spectral face. If I walk up to it, the damn thing disappears; I turn around, and there it is on the other side of the room. When I read or write I can *feel* it behind me. I keep the electric light on all night now, even when I fall asleep—it 's awful to wake up in the dark.

15th March 1919. I found my service revolver was rusty and still muddy around the butt. I 'd like to tick my servant off for leaving it so dirty. I cleaned it very carefully, and found myself almost wishing I was going up the line again. After all, that 's the only thing I know how to do, and the only place where I could forget everything. We made a damned silly mistake in being so eager to get back—the lucky ones are out there under six feet of French mud, God bless it. I saw a play the other night making fun of the demobilised officer who couldn't shake down to civilian life. A damned nice sense of humour that playwright has. You tell men for years they 're heroes, saving the nation, and making the world safe for everybody—and then you sneer at them because in two months they

don't immediately become efficient and obsequious commercial travellers ! I 'd like to kick that fellow where he keeps his intelligence, *i.e.* in his backside.

20th March 1919. I keep my revolver under my pillow at nights. These weapons of destruction are the only beautiful things in the modern world.

21st March 1919. A significant anniversary ! I 've had no sleep for three nights now. Every time I fall into a doze the German comes and presses his decaying face against mine. God in hell, it 's horrible ! I can't stand it.

. . . . . .

The following item of news appeared in several newspapers :

' A Coroner's Inquest was held yesterday on the body of Henry William Hall (26) who was found dead in bed on the morning of 22nd March. He had shot himself through the head with a service revolver. In accepting the Jury's Verdict of " Suicide while of Unsound Mind," the Coroner remarked that it seemed a pity this young man should have taken his life in the bloom and vigour of his youth. The deceased had been given a good post in Whitehall, but he (the Coroner) understood that he was dissatisfied with his lot. The Coroner felt it his duty to utter a warning to young men now returning to civilian life. They must realise that a high standard of conduct is expected of those who had the honour to serve their country in the

field. They must also realise that they had no right to expect that they should drop into easy jobs, or that they could all keep up the standard of extravagant living they had been accustomed to in the Army. They must realise that the civilian population had gone without necessities to give them comforts, and it was about time they realised that the boot is on the other foot. While paying every tribute to the Heroism of Our Glorious Troops, he did think that it was about time these young men came to their senses, realised that life is not all sky-larking, and settled down to do a little honest work.'

FAREWELL TO MEMORIES

FAREWELL TO MEMORIES

I

As a symbol of the gallant illusion of war I think of the cadets of St. Cyr, pledging themselves to wear in battle the bright crimson plumes of their ceremonial uniform —picked off to a man by the field-grey sharp-shooters.

As a symbol of the sullen reality I think of the straight treeless roads, glistening faintly with rain under a smouldering sky, the oblong platoons marching steadily up, the water dripping from the helmet brim, the smell of damp rubber ground-sheets worn as cloaks, the burdens, the anonymity.

As a symbol of war's power I think of the Third Army pouring interminably through the square of Bavay in pursuit of the enemy, an inexhaustible column, hour after hour, of infantry, artillery, cavalry, tanks, transport, moving forward with irresistible unwearied haste in complete silence. Not a bugle or drum, not a song, not a whistle, only the perpetual tramp of heavy boots and the rumble of wheels—an unconscious display of hard, controlled, majestic Power.

Brooding over that enormous waste of memories, I think of the demented crusading spirit of 1914, the indeterminate struggles of 1915, the murderous battles of 1916, the long calvary of 1917, the wholesale collapses of 1918, the immeasurable discouragements of afterwards.

Who will be worthy of this Epos of futility ? Who will tell its tragedy, comedy, pathos, horror, sacrifice, heroism, filth, degradation, misery, sorrow, cowardice, lust, exploitation, hypocrisy, greed, guilt, dreadful beauty—for in those days every passion and attribute of men and women were stirred into frightening activity ? It will be done by one who did not endure it, for those who will not care about it.

For us, the danger is that we shall say too much ; yet something may be said in farewell to these memories.

II

To have passed so close to annihilation, and to have become stained so inalterably with the ideas and habits of masses—this leaves me immeasurably discouraged, out of love with myself.

My thoughts are stifling—heavy grey dust from a scorched road.

Reveille sounded with peremptory harshness through the murky winter dawn : Get out of bed, get out of bed, get out of bed.

Were the huntsmen up in Persia, had they passed their first sleep in America ?

Orderly corporals ran along the lines, beating with loud swagger sticks on the tents, shouting :

' Get up there ! Up you get ! Hurry up ! Get dressed for pr'ade ! '

They shouted through the murk and soft inaudible rain. Where their sticks had touched the wet canvas

water gathered and slowly dripped inside. In all the tents men started awake, throwing off khaki overcoats and dun blankets, to sit up tousled in their grey-blue flannel shirts. Rifles were piled round the tent-pole, equipment lay beside the pillow pack.

'Get out of bed, get out of bed, get out of bed.'

In one of the tents Brandon awoke with the others. His thoughts were stifling, like heavy grey dust. Men yawned loudly and without concealment:

'Ah—a—a—a—ah! Damn this bloody war!'

'Why can't they let we bide quiet like?' said Huxtable, in a thin Devonshire voice.

'"Let 'ee bide"?' mocked Perks, the Cockney. 'You 're a bleedin' soldier nah, me lad. And don't you ferget it.'

'Us 'll never get the best o' they Germans, the Lord 's against us.'

'Lord Oo? Ain't the 'ole blinkin' peeridge on the bleedin' Staff?'

'Good Heavens!' said Holme, the commercial traveller petulantly. 'For God's sake shut up and get up, and give us a chance to dress!'

'Tell yer what I 'm goin' to do when I get into civvies and start walkin' abaht in one o' them **** 'ats. I 'm goin' to give some bleeder 'arf-a-crown to blow Revally ahtside the window every ahr from five t' ten while me an' the ole Missis lies in bed. I could do wiv a bit nah, I could.'

Nobody answered. Brandon wondered why Perks took such delight in these stereotyped pleasantries, and vaguely calculated that if the war lasted another

year without Perks being killed, he would then have made the remark seven hundred times.

A corporal pushed his head into the tent. Every one, except Perks and Huxtable, was dressing in fumbling haste—lacing heavy boots, folding puttees, buttoning tunics.

'Come on, lads, Roll Call.' Then indignantly: 'Ere you two, Perks, 'Uxtable, what d' yer mean by stoppin' in kip like that? If you ain't on pr'ade in two minutes I 'll 'ave yer up for it, I will.'

Grey dust of stifling thoughts settled on Brandon's spirit—back at the Base, soon up the line again.

Roll Call under the wet sky, heavy boots treading the dark wet sand. The sergeant-major's voice:

'Pr'ade again, eight-thirty, clean fatigue. Any one tryin' to dodge this fatigue 'll be for it! Dis-miss.'

'Blowed if we ain't clicked agine,' said Perks disgustedly. 'I never see sech a bleedin' war as this. What they want us for nah?'

Lining up for the troughs under the rain to wash and shave in cold water. Lining up outside the Mess huts for breakfast—mug of tea, slice of fat pork, small hunk of bread and margarine, two large dog biscuits. Bully, more biscuits, and a small lump of cheese for day's rations.

Roll Call again—precaution against dodging the column. Then 'Ten-shun, and a subaltern. They marched out, eyes righting the saluting sentry, down

the lorry-haunted road to the town, through the town to the docks. They halted, and the officer spoke :

' We 've got to unload ten trucks of hay, and re-load them on to barges. As soon as the work is finished you can go, but it has to be done, and you 'll have to stay here until it 's finished. Now get on with it.'

The N.C.O.'s yelped them into little droves, and led them to the trucks. Those who were manual labourers brightened up at the sight of a job they knew, zealously unlashed tarpaulins, and let down the sides of the trucks. Perks gazed at the mountains of hay with horror, and took Brandon aside :

' We ain't 'arf clicked unlucky this time. I betcher that orfficer mucks off in 'arf an ahr. Nah, if you an' me was to give the sergeant five francs, 'e 'd let us 'op it presen'ly. We can nip dahn tahn an' 'ave a bit of a piss-up 'fore Roll Call to-night. What abaht it ? '

' No ! ' said Brandon, ' I certainly won't try to bribe a sergeant, and I won't dodge a job like that. Some one 's got to do it.'

' Garn ! You ain't got no spunk, you ain't ! '

Brandon worked with Holme, carrying the bales of hay from the train to the men stacking them on the barge. As Perks foretold, the officer disappeared. The bales of hay, tightly compressed and held by wire and ropes of twisted straw, were deliciously fragrant but dirty and very heavy. Brandon and Holme found it heart-breaking and back-breaking, but the scent of the hay stirred old poignant memories. The rain dripped from the ground-sheets worn cloak-wise, the

sweat started from their bodies, their faces were dirty, their fingers grimed and bruised.

The weariness of this dirt and labour, of this dirty melting sky!

For hours we have carried great bundles of hay from train to barge. . . . The weariness of this dirt and labour!

Last June those heavy dried bales waved and glittered in the fields of England:

Cinquefoil and clover, buttercups, fennel, thistle and rue, daisy and ragged robin, wild rose from the hedge, shepherd's purse, and long sweet nodding stalks of grass.

Heart of me, heart of me, be not sick and faint, though fingers and arms and head ache; you bear the gift of the glittering meadows of England. Here are bundles from Somerset, from Wales, from Hereford, Worcester, Gloucester—names we must love, scented with summer peace.

Handle them bravely, meadow-sweet, sorrel, lush flag and arid knap-weed, flowers of marsh and cliff, handle them bravely.

Dear crushed flowers, dear gentle, perished sisters, speak, whisper, and move, tell me you will dance and whisper for us in the wind next June.

The weather grew colder and colder. They went up the line—same broken carriages, same dreary crawl, same old speculations as to where they were going. They joined a battalion which was out on Divisional rest, and Brandon, Holme, Huxtable, and Perks were allotted to the same company. They became part of

Number 2 section of Number 3 platoon of 'A' Company. Part of the great anonymous mass.

They moved up nearer to the line, and were billeted in a ruined village among artillery. A sickness of old memories came over Brandon as he plodded wearily up the long slippery *pavé* road. The shattered trees gleamed sadly with hoar-frost in the evening twilight, the ditches were frozen hard, the drab grass crouched under the weight of cold. Their billet was the lower storey of a ruined cottage, crowded with wire and sacking beds on the earth floor, with every opening blinded by sacks to prevent light being seen. Perks and Huxtable scrounged wood to light in a brazier they had found.

Brandon went out and watched the cold sunset. Deep silence over a mourning world, broken at times by the chill yellow flash and harsh crack of an eighteen-pounder. The shell whined away dismally diminuendo. To his left, beyond the ruined village, he could see rows of little crosses black against the frosty earth. From the billet behind he heard Perks's voice :

' 'Ere you are, me lucky lads, bit o' the old 'ome. Gettin' a nice fire now, we are. Split up a bit more o' that wood, 'Uxtable. Got that machonichie I pinched, 'Olme ? '

In his pocket Brandon had a letter, from a woman, speaking of a Debussy concert, of dances in aid of Belgian refugees, of how beautiful the first snowdrops looked in the library, of how happy he must be to have the chance of striking another blow for freedom, of the loveliness of winter twilight over the quiet meadows.

' The poetry of winter '—these words remembered from some aesthetic essay, return and return to my memory, with an ironic persistence.

The ground is sheeted in frost, the sky rose upon the pale green coverlet of evening, bare trees silhouetted, frozen pools of water.

' The poetry of winter '—yes, that is indeed poetry, the breath of the gods, light glowing and changing, motionless trees, clear air.

Yes, one can be hungry, sore, unshaven, dirty, eyes and head aching, limbs shivering, and yet love beauty.

From the depths I cry it, from the depths which echo with the ironic phrase ' the poetry of winter,' from the depths I cry it.

You, who are clean and warm with the delicate leisure of a flower-scented library, strain your hearing, listen across the clamour of the age, to a whisper which comes to you so faintly, so ironically—' The poetry of winter.'

III

They took over a section of the front line.

How much that phrase means to those who know, how little it can ever mean to those who do not know. Yet it is something to have done your four or six days in the front line, time after time, month after month.

Number 2 section lived together, marched together, ate together, worked together, fought together, endured exactly the same experiences. Yet Perks wore his helmet with a tilt, alternately grousing and joking; grousing when things went well, joking if they went

badly. He it was who, after two hours' intense bombardment when the trench was wrecked and full of the stench of high explosive and gas and blood, and the moans of wounded, pulled a half-consumed cigarette from behind his dirty ear, and said : ' Well, me lucky lads, 'baht time fer a spit an' a dror, I reckon.' If he had been told he was a brave man, he would have stared and told the complimenter to put a sock in it. Huxtable plodded through the war as if following some dreadful inevitable plough—inarticulate, apparently insentient, dumbly crushed, and unhappy. Holme expended vast energy in petty wanglings—to get a candle, an extra drink of rum, a tin of jam, a soft job on a ration party. If he could obtain some infinitesimal privilege to which he was not entitled, he was happy. Brandon suffered. Who can estimate suffering ? There is no apparatus to measure the human spirit ; you may weigh the stars, but you cannot gauge what happens in a human soul. At these things we guess. But where Perks swore or joked, where Huxtable plodded, and Holme pettily wangled, Brandon suffered. He was conscious of degradation, and that in turn made him more than ever conscious of any rare moment of beauty.

Slowly, too slowly, the night, with its noise and its fear and its murder, yields to the dawn. One by one the guns cease. Quicker, O dawn, quicker—dazzle the hateful stars, lighten for us the weight of the shadows.

The last rat scuttles away ; the first lark thrills with a beating of wings and song. The light is soft ; deliberately,

consciously, the young dawn moves. My unclean flesh is penetrated with her sweetness, and she does not disdain even me.

Out of the east as from a temple comes a procession of girls and young men, smiling, brave, candid, ignorant of grief.

Few men know the full bitterness of night, but they alone will know the full beauty of dawn—if dawn ever comes.

As the days and weeks passed Brandon felt as if he were for ever sliding down a grey sand slope of grief and despair and misery. The crash of shells, the tearing whine of bullets seemed to beat into him misery and despair and grief. The very thought of hope became intolerable, and he despised himself for ever having been deluded by the vain shows of life, sneered at himself because he had once cared for intelligence and beauty.

Life has deceived us. The thoughts we found so vivid and fresh were dull and crass as the prayers muttered to a worn rosary by an infidel priest.

The joy we felt in beauty, our sense of discovery at the touch of some age-green bronze, even the sick horror of some battle-field where the flesh had not quite fallen from shattered bones—all this was old, a thousand times felt and forgotten.

They went into another and livelier section of the line, where they had rather a baddish time. They

were thrown into a local attack, and the battalion lost about two hundred officers and men. They had to struggle along interminable trenches deep in mud before they reached their jumping-off place. Then the attack was postponed for twenty-four hours, which they spent crouching in a shallow trench which had six inches of water in it. While daylight lasted it was impossible to move or to bring up rations. Some of the men cut narrow slits in the side of the trench, like catacomb graves, and lay there trying to sleep. Others huddled helplessly in the mud and wet. Occasionally a little bevy of shells hurtled over and crashed along the parapet. They had several casualties, and all were exhausted before the attack began. After nightfall, they had to go down for rations and ammunition, stumbling and slithering and falling through the mud and wire. At dawn a line of chilled, pale, muddy, unshaven men climbed painfully from the trench and lumbered across No Man's Land. They had only two hundred yards to go, and lost a sixth of their number.

The German trench had only been occupied by a couple of posts, who lay dead and dying in the slimy mud. It was a trap for the attackers. Enemy machine guns enfiladed them, trench mortars harried them, field artillery smothered them in smoke, noise, and flying splinters. The stretcher-bearers ran up and down the trench, binding men's wounds. They had to use dead bodies to build up the parapet. They beat off three counter-attacks.

An hour after dark the order came to evacuate the

trench and return to the support line. Wearily they staggered back in sections, and gathered in the front communication trenches. At that moment, Perks, who was just in front of Brandon, suddenly staggered and fell. Brandon and Holme bent over him, trying to lift his head in the darkness.

'What is it, Perks?'

'All right, mate—I 've copped my packet.'

'Get the stretcher-bearer, Holme.'

'All right, mate—I 'm done—tell my missus—she 's bin—a good 'un—and—not fret . . .'

When the stretcher-bearer came panting up, Perks was dead.

Escape, let the soul escape from this insanity, this insult to God, from this ruined landscape, these murdered fields, this bitterness, this agony, from this harsh death and disastrous mutilation, from this filth and labour, this stench of dead bodies and unwashed living bodies—escape, let the soul escape.

The company commander was uncertain what to do with Perks's body. He did not want to leave it lying at the side of a communication trench, where it would be trampled in the darkness, and perhaps hastily buried by a strange unit; on the other hand he knew his men were exhausted. He said:

'Will any one volunteer to take the body back to the transport lines for burial?'

Holme and Brandon spoke together:

'Yes, sir.'

They were in fighting order, and had to keep their rifles slung. The body was amazingly heavy. Under the dark sky, lit from time to time by the glow of Verey lights or the flashes of guns, they staggered towards the Advanced Dressing Station. Shells burst near them, and they hardly noticed the explosions. The stretcher-strap cut into their shoulders, the handles bruised their fingers, the dead weight dragged at their arms until the muscles burned and the weary body almost sobbed for rest. They fell heavily in shell-holes, tripped over hummocks, slid in the soft mud. Each time they dropped the inert body they felt as if they hurt the dead man, physically and morally.

At the Dressing Station they halted beside the road and asked for a wheeled stretcher. Then in silence, staggering with sleep and weariness, they pushed it along the road.

There is no exaltation for those who watch beside the Road, the Road some know too bitterly, and many will never know, the Road which is the Place of Skulls—for it starts from a graveyard, and passes through graveyards, and ends in a graveyard.

By day the Road is empty and desolate ; no boot or wheel marks its mud, no human figure is reflected in its deep shell-pools. By day the Road is silent. But at night it is alive with a harsh monotonous epic. Along that muddy trail move the rattling transport limbers, the field-guns, the ammunition wagons, the Red Cross cars lurch and sway on their springs over its steep ruts. Down the Road come the weary battalions, platoon after platoon,

heroic in their mud and silence. Down the Road come the dead men on the silent wheeled stretchers. All that goes up the Road is strong and young and alive ; all that comes down is weary and old, or dead. Over the Road shriek and crash the shells ; the sharp bullets strike gold sparks from its stones ; the mortars tear craters in it.

Just before dawn when the last limber rattles away, and the last stretcher has gone back to the line, then the ghosts of the dead armies march down, heroic in their silence, battalion after battalion, brigade after brigade, the immeasurable forces of the dead youth of Europe march down the Road past the silent sentry, past the ruined house, march back, march home.

IV

Grant that nothing ignoble may render me base to myself.

The weeks and months passed on. Perks was dead, Huxtable wounded, Holme had a job at the Base. Thus loneliness was added to despair. Only when they had gone did Brandon realise how much that coarse human relationship had comforted him. A Cockney bar-tender, a commercial traveller, a Devonshire ploughman, for a time had been the centre of his affections. He mourned for poor little Perks, regretted Holme and Huxtable, did not even despise Holme for wangling his Base job.

In June 1918, Brandon was on guard at Battalion

Headquarters when the great gas attack happened. He had reached a stage where he did not care whether he lived or died. All that was left of human in him was a tenacious determination not to lose his inner integrity, not to do anything which would lose his self-respect. Therefore he carried out all duties thoroughly, but with a sort of dull despair. His face was quite expressionless, his eyes dull but haunted—he had seen too much.

The moon, high-seated above the ridge, fills the ruined village with tranquil light and black broken shadows—ruined walls, shattered timbers, piles of rubbish, torn-up ground, almost beautiful in this radiance, in this quiet June air.

To-night the air blows cleaner and sweeter—the chemistry of earth is slowly purifying the corrupting bodies, the waste and garbage of armies. Sweetness, darkness, clean space—the marble rock of some Greek island, piercing its sparse garments of lavenders and mints like a naked nymph among rustling leaves.

Heavy scented the air to-night—new-mown hay—a pungent, exotic odour—phosgene!

And to-morrow there will be huddled corpses with blue horrible faces, and foam on their writhed mouths.

Battalion Headquarters were in the cellars of a ruined village about eight hundred yards behind the front line. The ground rose sharply up to a long crest, silhouetted against the clear moonlit sky. There ran the front line with its valuable observation posts looking far across

the enemy's country. Brandon stood on the edge of the village street beside what had once been the entrance to some industrial building—a brewery perhaps, judging from the boilers and wrecked tangled machinery. The sides of the road were bordered by neat piles of stones and bricks, remnants of houses cleared from the *pavé*.

Brandon could see up and down the road—one end of which vanished into No Man's Land—and commanded quite a large sector of the front. Occasionally, he walked up and down his beat, but mostly he stood still, leaning on his rifle and fixed bayonet, and gazing at the beauty of the night. It was growing towards dawn, but the stars and moonlight were still splendid, filling the soft blue-green sky with delicate light. Except for a light breeze from the enemies' line the night was perfectly still. He heard limbers rattling back to the transport lines in the distance; the clink of picks and shovels from a returning working-party was perfectly sharp and clear. Not a gun was in action.

Suddenly the whole horizon within his gaze rushed up into a sheet of flame, the air whistled and roared with projectiles, which landed with a terrific crash and splutter of fire all along the front line. Brandon half stepped back in amazement and horror. For a moment he thought it was the first discharge of a battle barrage. Then, as no more came, the truth flashed across him—gas containers, thousands of them! He leaped to the Klaxon horn and gave the alarm: 'Gas.' Already the officers had rushed from the cellars and

were questioning him through the bellow of the mechanical horn :

' What is it, Brandon, what 's happened ? '

' Gas containers, I think, sir. The whole front line 's smothered with them.'

It was only too true. On the crest of the hill they could see the low cloud of gas, beginning to creep into the valley, and the air was already tainted with phosgene. The Colonel ordered every one to wear gas masks, and himself went to the front line to see what had happened. Three working-parties from the battalion had been involved, and many of the men had been too slow in getting on their masks in the surprise. Those, also, who had been wounded by splinters of the containers had inevitably been victims.

In the confusion they forgot to relieve Brandon, and he remained at his post until long after dawn. Stretcher after stretcher passed him with ghastly agonised figures on them, foaming madmen clutching and fighting for breath, or inert figures covered with blankets. As the stretchers passed, the bearers shouted to him the names of those they were carrying.

I am haunted by the memory of my dawns. Not those earlier dawns when I saw for the first time the bell-towers of Florence in the lucid air, or the hills of Ravello violet and mist-wreathed against the gold sky ; not those dawns when I rose from some exquisite and beloved body, the brain still feverish with desire, lips and eyes heavy with kisses, to watch the cool waves of light gliding over the silvery roofs of London while the first sparrows twittered

in the heavy plane-trees. Not those dawns, but others, tragic and pitiful.

I remember harsh wakenings of winter-time in old French barns, through whose broken tiles at night one saw the morose glitter of the stars, and at dawn the sterile glitter of snow, dawns when one's breath was frozen to the blanket, and the contact of the air was anguish.

I am haunted by sombre or ironically lovely dawns seen from some bleak parade ground, by misty spring dawns in the trenches, when the vague shapes of the wire seemed to be the forms of crouching enemies, by summer dawns when the fresh immeasurably deep blue was a blasphemy, an insult to human misery.

Yet one among them all is poignant, unforgettable. As the shapes of things grew out slowly from the darkness, and the gentle grey suffusion of light made outlines visible, little groups of men carrying stretchers on their shoulders came slowly, stumbling and hesitating, along the ruined street. For a moment each group was silhouetted against the whitening east ; the steel helmets (like those of medieval men-at-arms), the slung rifles, the strained postures of carrying, the useless vacillating corpse under its sepulchral blanket—all sharply edged in black on that smooth sky. And as the groups passed they shouted the names of the things they carried—things which yesterday were living men.

V

The last months of the war were a strange hallucination. Almost every week brought news of ' victories ' and ' advances ' to armies which were now

utterly indifferent to victory or defeat. What in 1915, or even in 1916, would have been received with delighted enthusiasm, now scarcely caused the least tremor of interest. The war had lasted long enough to show the inanity of war. All that terrific effort had resulted in nothing but indifference.

Although immense numbers of troops were engaged, the clashes with the enemy's rear-guard were as nothing compared with the fierce struggles of earlier years. Decorations were lavishly dished out after 'battles' where the battalion lost perhaps a couple of officers and seventy men. Brandon thought of the days when half a battalion was wiped out in attacking or defending a few hundred yards of trench, and nobody dreamed of decorations.

They fought their way across the old battle-fields into country which had not been touched since 1914. But the dreariness of that late autumn landscape—the leafless, shattered trees, the drenched abandoned fields, the smashed cottages and burned churches, the starved people, the roads littered with dead bodies, dead horses, broken limbers, anti-tank and machine guns, rifles, overcoats, gas-masks, packs, water-bottles, an inconceivable waste.

If a man can become a robot, Brandon had done so. His mind was a chaos of confusion, agony, and despair; his body ate, slept, marched, fought, at the bidding of his superiors. Since living was death, he felt that dying would be like a return to life—at any rate, repose.

Yet he did not feel his own complete fatigue, the

isolated madness of the Armies, until the day after he was told that the war was over, and an Armistice signed.

Those who have passed through hell need only to pass through Lethe to become sane once more. When I remember those horrible brooding years, my body shudders ; an immense discouragement, a brooding weariness, envelop me.

Old pain, old terror, old exasperations crowd upon me—nights spent in shivering anguish shovelling cold mud under shell-fire ; interminable marches over pavé *roads through incredibly insipid country, marches when the over-weight of a soldier's burden became an exasperation, a mad obsession ; wet night watches in splashy trenches, mud soaking legs and feet to a kind of numb pain—and always the fierce whine of bullets, the nerve-racking detonation of shells ; exhausting unrefreshing sleep in frowsty dug-outs on verminous sacks ; food muddy and impure. And always the menace—annihilation. Every second it was possible : how did we not go mad? We were mad, utterly insane.*

Proserpina, Lady of Hell, in whose keeping are the great sombre rivers, grant me I beseech one draught of Lethe to purge my spirit of horror, to make me worthy to mingle with sane men once more.

The train which was taking Brandon back to England for the last time started from Cambrai before dawn. About eight miles from the town, in the Somme battle-field, it halted for nearly two hours. Brandon stared out the window, still wearing his full equipment,

with his rifle mechanically clutched between his knees. The colourless winter dawn hovered mournfully over a desecrated land, over a wreckage and sorrow that were beyond tears or outcries. Nothing can express that pitiable frozen silence, that awful symbol of the hatred of men for men. There stood a broken tank, poised on the verge of a huge shell-hole, just as it met disaster months before. There still lay the debris of battle. Guns, cocked sideways on broken wheels, showed where men had died. The frozen landscape was a tumult of shell-holes. Everywhere stood little groups of crosses ; and to the south was a large, neatly lined cemetery. That was the symbol of the youth of a generation—lines of crosses. That was the symbol for all of them, living or dead—a graveyard on a battle-field. Never again would there be hope and gladness, never again free laughter and the joy of a girl's soft lips. Through the music and the laughter, through the soft touches and the voice of desire and the starry eyes, always, always they would see that silent landscape, always see the lines of humble crosses marking a world destroyed. Men passed his window, going to the engine to beg a little boiling water to make tea. Brandon scarcely saw them. With the tears trickling slowly down his cheeks, he saw only the lines upon lines upon lines of crosses. There was no room for bitterness even, no need for speech.

We pass and leave you lying. No need for rhetoric, for funeral music, for melancholy bugle-calls. No need for tears now, no need for regret.

We took our risk with you ; you died and we live. We take your noble gift, salute for the last time those lines of pitiable crosses, those solitary mounds, those unknown graves, and turn to live our lives out as we may.

Which of us were the fortunate—who can tell? For you there is silence and the cold twilight drooping in awful desolation over those motionless lands. For us sunlight and the sound of women's voices, song and hope and laughter, despair, gaiety, love—life.

Lost terrible silent comrades, we, who might have died, salute you.

THE END

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